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PARO

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A FEW PAROCHIAL SERMONS.

A Few Parochial Sermons

PREACHED AT

S. BARNABAS' CHURCH, KENSINGTON.

BY

FRANCIS HESSEY, D.C.L.

LATE VICAR OF S. BARNABAS' AND RURAL DEAN OF KENSINGTON.

*"I pour out my heart by myself: for I went with the multitude,
and brought them forth into the house of God, with the voice of
praise and thanksgiving."*



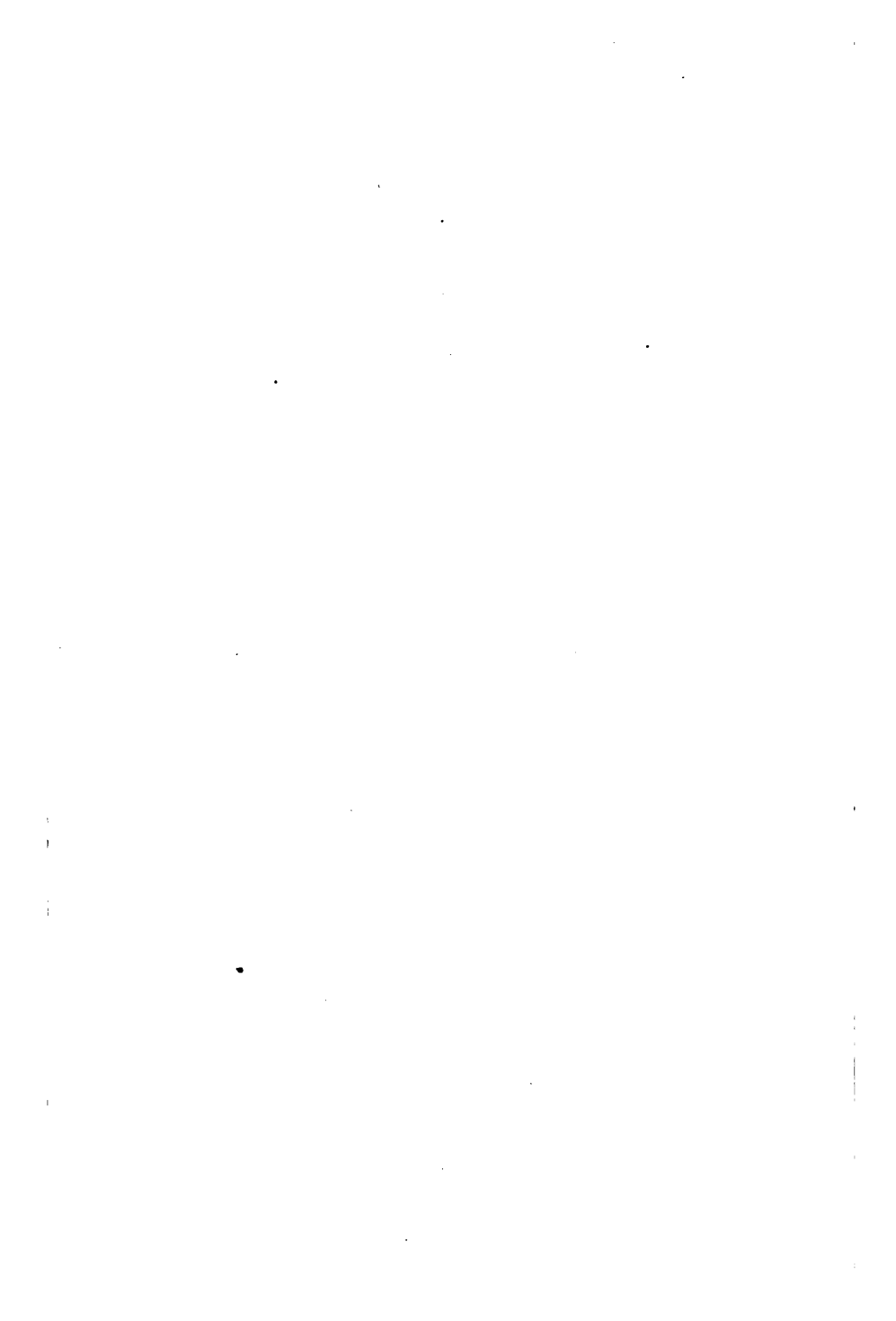
Ps. XLII. 4

London:

SKEFFINGTON AND SON, 163, PICCADILLY, W.

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1882.

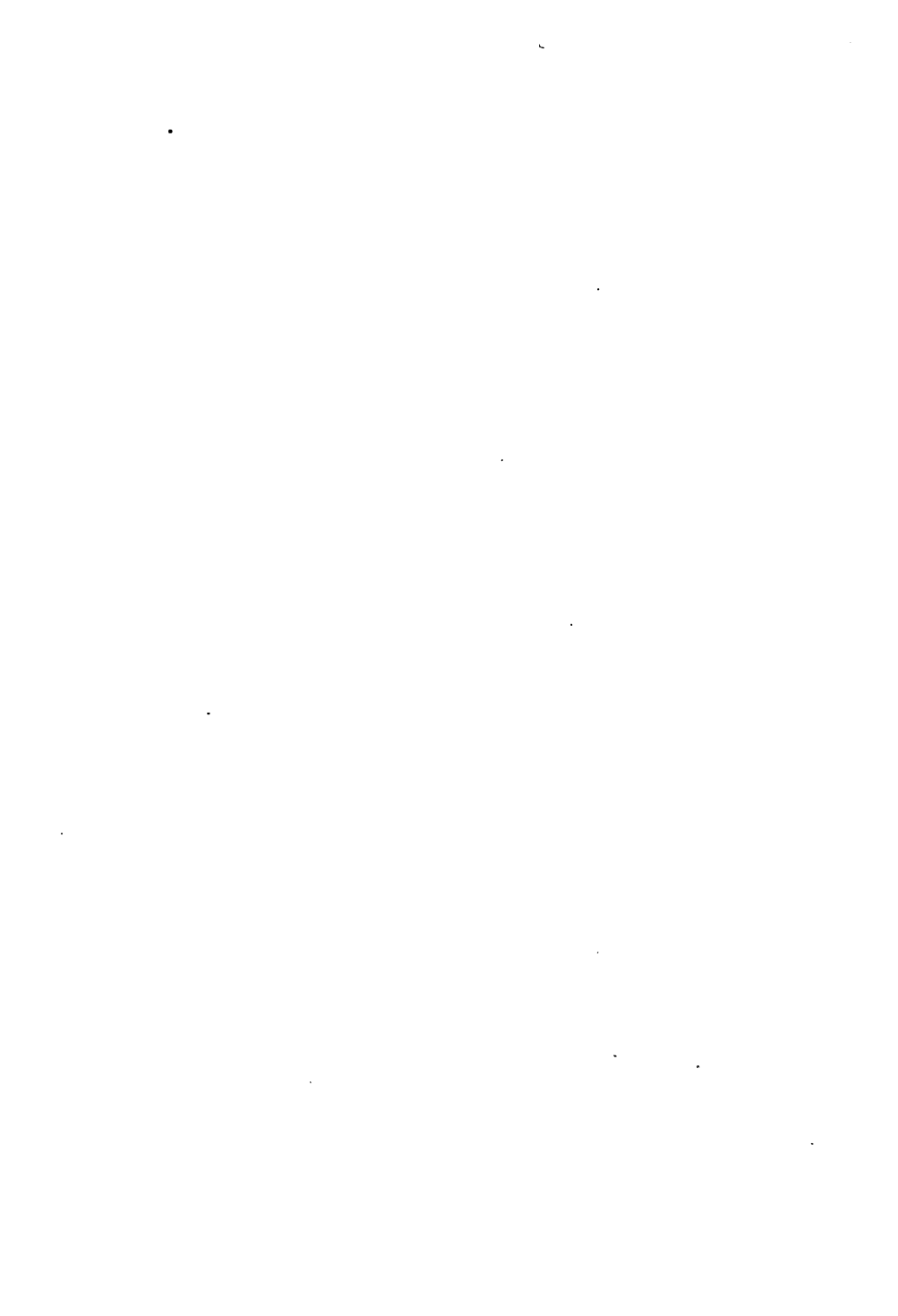
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Dedication.

TO THE
CONGREGATION AND PARISHIONERS OF
S. BARNABAS' CHURCH, KENSINGTON,
THIS VOLUME
CONSISTING OF A FEW OF THE SERMONS
PREACHED IN THEIR HEARING
IS AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED
IN AFFECTIONATE REMEMBRANCE
OF EIGHT-AND-TWENTY YEARS
SPENT IN GOD'S SERVICE
AMONGST THEM.

*Colebrook House, Bognor,
S. Barnabas' Day, 1882.*



P R E F A C E .

The contents of this volume are selected from a mass of more than two thousand Sermons and Notes of Sermons, delivered during a residence at Kensington of nearly forty years, and a ministry at S. Barnabas' Church of nearly thirty.

God has pleased to bring that ministry to a sudden close, and to give His servant the opportunity of quietly looking back upon the work that formed so long his pleasure and his duty.

Many of the labours of a Parish Priest, so far as they have been faithfully undertaken and diligently carried out, survive in the institutions which he transmits to a successor, to be either continued or modified as circumstances may require. But of his preaching there remains but little record, when his voice is no longer heard from the pulpit. The fruit of it may, indeed, be traced, even after many days, in the life and character of his hearers and their children, and what can he wish more? But in some cases, those hearers desire to retrace a few of the words actually spoken in their presence, and by them to recal in imagination the presence of a friend now parted from them for a while.

In compliance with such a wish, this little volume is issued, consisting of Sermons preached on some leading days of the Christian year, and a few others, which have been for the most part asked for by those who heard them. They are printed as they were delivered, except so far as topics of local and temporary interest have been removed from them. It is hoped that no one will attribute to the preacher any conceit of authorship. His object in their delivery was the edification of a flock in which he was deeply interested; his object in their publication is the gratification of a few members of that flock, by whom he would not willingly be forgotten.

*Colebrook House, Bognor,
S. Barnabas' Day, 1882.*

X.

SERMON IV.

NEW YEAR'S DAY.

(FESTIVAL OF THE CIRCUMCISION.)

PSALM XXX. 5.

"Joy cometh in the morning."

SERMON V.

ASH WEDNESDAY.

(THE COMMUNION SERVICE.)

PSALM CXIX. 21.

"Thou hast rebuked the proud: and cursed are they that do
err from Thy Commandments."

SERMON VI.

LENT.

(THE FAST THAT GOD HATH CHOSEN.)

ISAIAH LVIII. 6, 7.

"Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of
wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go
free? and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to
the hungry, and thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house?
when thou seest the naked that thou cover him? and that thou hide
not thyself from thine own flesh?"

SERMON VII.

GOOD FRIDAY.

LAMENTATIONS III. 64-66.

“Render unto them a recompence, O LORD, according to the work of their hands. Give them sorrow of heart, Thy curse unto them. Persecute and destroy them in anger from under the heavens of the LORD.”

LUKE XXIII. 34.

“FATHER, FORGIVE THEM, FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO.”

SERMON VIII.

EASTER.

ROMANS VI. 1-5.

“What shall we say then? shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid! How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by Baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His Resurrection.”

SERMON IX.

ASCENSION.

(Preached at St. Paul's Cathedral, May 30, 1878.)

PROVERBS XXX. 4.

“Who hath ascended into heaven, or descended? Who hath gathered the wind in His fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what is His Name, and what is His Son's Name, if thou canst tell?”

SERMON X.

WHITSUN-DAY.

JOHN XVI. 12-15.

"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself, but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will show you things to come. He shall glorify Me; for He shall receive of Mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are Mine: therefore said I, that He shall take of Mine, and shall shew it unto you."

SERMON XI.

HOLY TRINITY.

JOHN XIV. 23.

"If a man love Me, He will keep My words; and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him."

SERMON XII.

S. BARNABAS.

ACTS IV. 36, 37.

"Joses, who by the Apostles was surnamed BARNABAS, (which is, being interpreted, *the Son of Consolation*), a Levite, and of the Country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the Apostles' feet."

SERMON XIII.

HARVEST.

(IN AN UNFRUITFUL YEAR.)

JOHN IV. 37.

"One soweth, and another reapeth."

SERMON XIV.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE PLAGUE OF OUR OWN HEART.

1 KINGS VIII. 38-40.

“What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man or by all Thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands toward this house: then hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart Thou knowest (for Thou, even Thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men;) That they may fear Thee all the days that they live in the land which Thou gavest unto our fathers.”

SERMON XV.

CONTEMPLATIVE PIETY.

PSALM XXVII. 4.

“One thing have I desired of the LORD; that will I seek after:—that I may dwell in the House of the LORD all the days of my life; to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in His Temple.”

LUKE X. 42.

“One thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”

SERMON XVI.

SEIZE THE PRESENT TIME.

JOHN VII. 6.

“My time is not yet come; but your time is always ready.”

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SERMON XVII.

UNSUSPECTED DANGER.

PROVERBS I. 17.

"Surely in vain the net is spread, in the sight of any bird."

SERMON XVIII.

THE ELEVENTH HOUR.

MATTHEW XX. 7.

"No man hath hired us,"

SERMON XIX.

A DOOR OPENED.

2 COR. II. 13, 14.

"When I came to Troas to preach Christ's Gospel, and a door was opened to me of the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother: but taking leave of them, I went into Macedonia."



SERMON I.

A D V E N T .

ROM. XIII. 12.

"The night is far spent."

"NIGHT comes before the day." This fact is impressed upon us in the first chapter of Genesis, when, in the History of Creation, it is recorded, not, as we might have expected, "The morning and the evening," but "The evening and the morning were the first day." And so is the phrase repeated for each one of the days except the *seventh*, in which there is no mention either of evening or of morning, because apparently the Sabbath is a type of the rest that remaineth for the people of God. For in the land of that rest, we are told, there is no night : yet is there "no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in

it, for the glory of the Lord doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." (Rev. xxi. 23.)

To that rest, brethren, we are looking forward, and we know not *when* it may begin. But this we do know, that it shall not be till Christ shall come again. Ever since He went away into Heaven, and took his seat at His Father's right hand, the Church has looked for His return. His personal followers were bidden by an angelic warning not to spend their time in gazing idly up to heaven for the first glimpse of His triumphal cavalcade. But to rest assured that, *as He went, so should He return*;—with the same unexpectedness, the same majesty—surrounded by those holy Angels who then had formed a bright cloud to receive Him out of human sight. His Apostles were now to go back to the City, from which He had led them out, and to tarry there in humble faith, and prayer, and toil, till they should be clothed with power from on high; (Luke xxii. 47) and then, when the Holy Spirit had thus fitted them for their labours, they were to apply themselves to their task of preaching the Gospel to every creature, baptizing those who should believe, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: preparing thus a people who should be ready for Him, when He should appear in power and great glory.

Such, brethren, has ever since been the attitude of Christ's expectant Church: and these Advent weeks have been observed from year to year, to remind us of our position and our prospect. Again and again, has the

Church, in a particular age, fancied that the day, which in God's counsels is ever at hand, was about to dawn.—Thus was it, when He judged the unfaithful City of Jerusalem, on which occasion some of the signs given by our Lord were so closely fulfilled, that we do not hesitate to say, that, in the result of the memorable siege of the once Holy City, His promise of a return to judgment was in some degree fulfilled. Still, though He was then come to judge the nation which He had hitherto set apart for His service, the nation which had betrayed and crucified Him, He was not yet come to judge the world ; and the greater part of the signs of His coming still waited for their fulfilment. Thus also afterwards, in the days of pagan persecution, when light at intervals seemed to shine forth out of darkness, men looked for His immediate appearing : but still the end came not : no, nor is it yet come, though men have often in our own day presumptuously said, “Lo ! here,” or “Lo ! there,” and then have been disappointed. The night still continues ; but in that night we have to prepare ourselves constantly for the day, knowing that it certainly is at hand. “The night is far spent,” says S Paul ; and if this could be said, even in his day, some eighteen centuries ago, how much more true is this expression now !

When S. Paul spoke of darkness, he of course described a much grosser darkness than surrounds us in these later days. It was the night of *Paganism* that was around him, through which only some feeble rays had yet made their

way. But that darkness has now in a great degree passed away, at least in our part of the world, and whatever darkness now prevails is due to men loving darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil, and they will not put them off. S. Paul bids the Romans, though in the midst of a still continuing night, walk as in the day,—as they would wish to be found walking when Christ shall come. He knows full well the dangers of the darkness, and therefore he bids men put on the armour of light, that they may be proof against them. (Rom. xiii. 12.)

We must not expect that all the metaphors used in this passage should perfectly harmonise as in a complete and regular parable. But it seems to me that when the Apostle bids us “put on the armour of light,” and presently says, “put on the Lord Jesus Christ,” He intends that armour to signify the virtues which shone brightly in Christ, and which ought to appear also in the character of His followers. To Him must we therefore look for an example, and remember, that while He was in this world as Man, He was the Light of the world, however little the darkness of the world comprehended Him. We must, by our Christian conduct, put to shame the evil that is around us on all sides. In darkness, S. Paul suggests, much evil is done, because men fear not detection, but think to transgress unseen. He therefore says that Christians will take no such advantage of the surrounding gloom. They will walk honestly, walk in such a way that men may find as little as possible to censure. They will do their

duty, under all circumstances, as under the eye of God, who seeth in secret and will be able to reward openly. He then goes on to specify some of the vices of the heathen world, from the indulgence of which Christians should be as far as possible removed. And let us not be surprised if these vices are what we call coarse. They are so indeed, and the public opinion which now deems them so is due to the unacknowledged influence of Christianity on the outward habits of men, however little it may sometimes have controlled their secret practices, or their inward imaginations.

What says he first? "Not in rioting and drunkenness." How strange, some will say, that it should be necessary to speak of such sensual excesses. Not at all strange, we reply, if we remember that in the City, to whose Christian inhabitants S. Paul was writing, there existed a most cynical contempt for the poor virtue which we call *temperance*. Men would devote the price of whole estates to the purchase of a single dish at an overflowing banquet; their wines were purchased at great cost in every country under heaven; they would sit down to table at an early hour, and not finish their enjoyment, as they called it, while their reason remained; at certain seasons, their riotous entertainments were held in idol temples, when their so-called deities were taken from their pedestals, and placed as guests at the festive board; the viands were served by slaves, and if one of these should fail in his duty and break a glass or porcelain

vessel, he was doomed to a cruel death. When this was the case in Rome, can we wonder that Roman Christians should be warned against rioting and drunkenness? But it may be said, "surely such profligacy would have no attraction for Christians." True, brethren, it would not, as long as Christians were true to their baptismal vows, mindful of the example of their Lord and His immediate followers. But this might not always be: There was danger of their complying with the example of those about them, and copying their wickedness,—nay, we know too well, that in Rome, in the days of S. Augustine, in Constantinople, in those of S. Chrysostom, Christians needed to be sharply reprov'd for such rioting and drunkenness as might have shamed a heathen nation. But why go so far back? Within the last two or three centuries, both England and France, said by their vain-glorious inhabitants to be the most civilised countries of the world, have been the scene of most disgraceful orgies; kings and their courtiers have roved the streets, a spectacle of drunkenness to the people: and men of the highest social rank have boasted that they have rarely gone to bed sober. Almost any book of history or biography, almost any work of probable fiction, will give proof of such shameless riot. "But is it so now?" it will be asked. "Happily, no," we answer. An example of virtue in high position, and a public opinion influenced for the better, have gradually wrought a great reform in many things; and a veil is thrown over the vices of the higher and middle classes, wherever

they are still indulged. But is it so throughout Society? Does the lower stratum of this Christian nation refrain from rioting and drunkenness? So far from it, in nearly every village, and at the corner of almost every street in every town, a house is licensed for what is called public entertainment, which is too often a scene of rioting and drunkenness, and from which it is necessary at a certain hour to exclude the lingering guests, lest they should exhibit riotousness worse than that of Pagan Rome. As long as such things are possible, even in a Christian nation, such as ours happily is, S. Paul's warning against rioting and drunkenness cannot be out of place, when the Advent Season comes, and men are reminded of their duty to walk honestly as in the day.

But what for the Apostle's second warning, "Not in chambering and wantonness." Was that called for when he wrote, or is it called for now? He wrote, let us remember, from Corinth, a Grecian city where lust had reigned unchecked, till Christianity was preached there by him. We cannot easily conceive, much less describe, the moral profligacy of the citizens, and the visitors of Corinth;—The sights and sounds, the words and ways, were corrupting in the extreme,—Nay, even the temples of the gods were scenes for the indulgence of brutal lust. And we know from S. Paul's 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, that even among the Congregation of Christians there instances had occurred of conduct so infamous as not to be even named among the Gentiles. (1 Cor. v. 1.)

And are things better among Christians now? I trust, brethren, they are. But yet the plague-spot of impurity has not entirely disappeared from Christian Society. Beware, ye that are young, how you give way to evil imaginations, evil conversations, or evil practices. There is nothing that estranges the heart more from Christ, than the lusts of the flesh. Beware—lest by your commerce with the world and its vices, you snap the bond that unites you to Christ. Beware—for the Holy Spirit will not dwell in a polluted temple. Beware—lest you fall so deeply that it be not possible to recover you again to repentance. (Heb. vi. 6 ; xii. 17.)

But there is yet another danger against which S. Paul warns the Christians at Rome, and that is “strife and envying.” There never has been a time, I fear, at which men have not needed warning on this point. There is always a sort of combativeness in the human mind, that sets it up in opposition to whatever is propounded to it, as true, either in fact or in principle. In S. Paul’s day, men were at variance on every possible subject. Philosophers disputed about the Chief Good ; Priests disputed about the relative value of their religious systems ; Politicians about the forms of government ; Merchants about their wares ; idle men about the public games or theatres ; Historians about the value of ancient records. In fact, wherever there was anything that could be disputed about, there was a contest, an unseemly, an ever recurring contest. Nor was it only in public that this strife went on. It invaded

also the privacy of families : and husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, parents and children, were at variance. The very disciples of our Lord, even while He was with them, disputed the possession of the highest place in His kingdom, which was only to be entered through sufferings. And in Corinth, when S. Paul wrote our text, Christians were dividing themselves into opposite camps, under the honoured names of Paul, Cephas, and Apollos, as though those holy men had desired to found schismatic churches in their own names. And can we say that this is not the case even now ? unfortunately we cannot. The proclamation of the first Advent of Christ was "peace upon earth, good will towards men." But though Christianity be the religion of peace,—though its Founder pronounced a special blessing upon peacemakers,—though His legacy was "Peace I leave with you : My peace I give unto you ;" we know that Peace does not prevail amongst Christians at the present day, in any much higher degree than it did among the heathen. I do not mean merely, what our Saviour sadly anticipated, that when a man became a Christian, his heathen household were set against him : that was true indeed. Among us such strife may well have passed away, as we all profess and call ourselves Christians : but unfortunately there is just as much contention about religion still. Numerous sects of dissenters rail against the Church, and what is more sad, parties within the Church denounce one another upon the poorest grounds. Nay, and beyond this, how much strife, how

much envy prevails among Christians, on other subjects than religion. How many hard words are used, and how often among the uneducated classes, are these hard words introductory to scarcely harder blows. Our daily papers teem with the records of quarrels and their fatal consequences: and where such publicity is happily not given to family disputes, how many unkind and envious squabbles are continually taking place! Many people fancy that such variances are of no importance, and, without even the semblance of reconciliation, proceed from the scene of a domestic quarrel to Church, and perhaps even there partake of the Holy Communion, for which one especial qualification is "to be in charity with all men."

O, Brethren, how inconsistent is such petty strife with the position of those who are aware that the night is far spent, and the day at hand: and who desire to walk honestly as in the day—that when Christ shall come He may find them waiting for His approach. Will you not watch against these ever-recurring evils? Will you not check your appetites, bridle your tongues and restrain your tempers, that you may in some slight degree resemble Him who left you an example that you might follow in His steps? who, when He was reviled, reviled not again, when He suffered threatened not? "You cannot do it"—you say—"You have tried and failed." Yes, brethren, we have all failed more or less: But we still must try again, and not give up the contest with our evil nature. We have not to strive alone—Christ has not left us comfortless, without One to

strengthen us—He has given us His Holy Spirit to be with us and assist us, till He shall come again. In all our battles with the world, the flesh, and the devil, we have at our disposal a strength not our own, if we will but call for it, and use it. The armour of light is ours already, if we will avail ourselves of it. It consists, not only of the quiet virtues which Christ displayed, as I have said already, but of the active weapons with which Christ fought His battle, and expects us to fight ours. Stand, therefore, in the gloom of the night-battle which you are now waging, in the expectation of the dawn which must shortly gleam upon your arms ;—Stand, as S. Paul encourages you, girt with the belt of truth, your head defended by the helmet of salvation, and your heart by the breast-plate of righteousness :—Stand, firmly established in the Gospel of peace,—with the shield of faith on your left arm, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, in your right hand :—stand, thus, while the battle continues, against the powers of darkness, which are banded against Christ and His Church ;—and you will not fail to conquer. Christ Himself is witness of His faithful servant's valour : and when the darkness is past, and the day shall dawn, He will be ready to receive the conqueror with the cheering word : “ Servant of God, well done : enter into the joy of Thy Lord ! ”

SERMON II. .

CHRISTMAS.

S. MATTHEW I. 23.

"EMMANUEL."

OUR text to-day is but *one word*:—yet that is one of the most important words that was ever pronounced or written. It sums up for us the result of this great day, and it anticipates the history of the world for the last eighteen centuries and more. *God with us*, is the explanation given by St. Matthew, in his inspired narrative of the Nativity of our Blessed Lord: and whilst giving it, he refers us back to the passage of the Old Testament in which the word was first employed. The slight difference in spelling between his word Emmanuel, and that to which he refers in the pages of Isaiah (IMMANUEL, Isaiah vii. 14)

is quite unimportant, and is simply due to the fact that the Prophet and the Evangelist employed two different languages. The grand point is, that the Evangelist appropriates the name given by the Prophet to the Babe of Bethlehem, of whose birth we have heard to-day; and by this application of the ancient prophecy confirms the miraculous fact of the Lord Jesus being a Virgin's Son

"All this was done," he says, "so as to fulfil the word spoken by the Prophet, 'Behold a Virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a Son, and they shall call His Name EMMANUEL.'" Not that our Saviour ever bore among men the name Emmanuel, any more than He was known by the actual titles, "Wonderful," "Counsellor," or "Prince of Peace" (Isaiah ix. 6); but that the *name* in question, like these *titles*, occurring in the pages of the same Prophet, would be descriptive of what He truly was—GOD WITH US.

Yes, truly, He was *God with us*:—unspeakable mystery; fact which none could by human knowledge either have anticipated or have afterwards imagined; but which happily is now established on such evidence as no one can deny! By the Revelation of the New Testament, we know that in the Unity of the Godhead there are Three Persons, and that the relation between the First and Second Persons is conveyed to our notions under the words *Father* and *Son*:—while from the Father and the Son there proceeds a Third Person, of one substance, power and eternity with the First and Second Persons.

All these Three Persons took part in the Creation of man, and all alike are interested also in his Redemption. God the Father's love permitted His dear Son to take human flesh ; God the Son, in the counsels of the Godhead, said, "Lo I come to do Thy will O God!" (Psalm xl. 7) God the Holy Ghost, overshadowed the highly-favoured daughter of man, (St. Luke i. 35) who was to be the Mother of that Humanity, which God the Son was contented to assume, never to be laid aside !

The mystery was in part revealed to the Blessed Virgin herself, but in part only—"Behold the handmaid of the Lord," she said to the Heavenly Messenger, "Be it unto me according to thy word"—whatever more she learned, she kept and pondered in her heart : and now, in the world above, she has fully understood how great was her privilege in being the Mother of her Lord.

What a happy task was hers, to care for such a Child as the Lord Jesus !—a Child that recompensed to the full all the labour that was expended on Him ! We know what a blessing it is to a mother to have the charge of an infant, but how much more blessed the care of a sinless Infant ! of One entirely without the original sin or corruption of our human nature : having, therefore, no fretful caprices, no perverse tempers, such as the best among our children very early display, and are but slowly trained to conquer. And yet it was an anxious charge also : the manger at Bethlehem was a rude cradle for the precious Infant, and had not the usual privilege of obscurity, namely, safety from

external danger. Kings stood up, and Rulers took counsel together against the Lord and His Anointed, even when that Anointed was an Infant at His mother's breast. But in vain:—jealous Herod might rage, and hireling Scribes tell him so much of the Scriptures as would put him on the trace of the Child he hoped to destroy.—But that Child was being conveyed in hasty flight to Egypt, before Herod's sword was whetted against the infants of David's City, in the vain hope that He might perish among them. A hurried journey, a needy exile, a childhood spent in a village so rude that even uncultured Galileans expected no good to come from it, were the early lot of Him who was *God with us*.

And shall we repine, if a few hardships fall to *our* lot, and that of our children, when we remember what *He* had to bear, who came into this world on such a winter morning as this, and spent such an infancy and childhood as I have described? Shall we not rather, in sympathy with Him, look round to discover those who have greater hardships than ours, especially in regard to their children, and endeavour to increase their comforts?

But now, brethren, since in the Child Jesus *God was with us*, we have to consider, "Why was *He with us*? what mission came He to fulfil?" He was *with us*, that He might shew His deep sympathy with His creatures: that they might be convinced that He has not launched them forth into being, and then left them uncared for; but has come Himself to prove His affectionate regard

for them. And could there be a greater proof of love, than that a Father should give His only Son, to spend a life of suffering and to die? or that a Son should leave the happiness of a Father's Home for such a world of misery as this was to Him?

Had He been merely man, such a sacrifice would have been great. But what was it, when you think of the Father and the Son, whose sympathy with man I have described, as GOD—very God—Eternal, Almighty, GOD! It is beyond all our faculties to understand such a condescension as this was; and yet, remember, it was real:—for He who was born this day was *God with us!*

And, again, He was with us, not merely to show His sympathy, but to set us an example. There is not a human misery to which He did not submit—poverty, privation, pain, hunger, thirst, exposure, persecution, mockery, desertion, and, last'y, crucifixion:—Under all these successive miseries, He set us an example, a glorious and complete example, as perfect Man—and yet, remember, while bearing all this, He was *God with us.*

And even more:—He was with us, not merely to show His sympathy, and to set an example, but also to make an atonement: and none can tell how much is conveyed under that word. Man's first transgression had brought sin into the world, and death, the consequence of sin. But He, who was born this morning, came to bear the penalty of sin: having assumed a nature accessible to

temptation, He resisted each temptation, and yet bore the weight of the accumulated sin of the whole world, pressing upon His sinless human soul. How great was this weight, we know, from His agony in the garden, and its terrible effects upon His human frame, as also from His bitter loneliness on the Cross, when He cried, "My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Yet even over all this He was triumphant, meekly resigned His Spirit into His Father's Hands, and so passed into that unseen world, where the spirits were abiding who had died in faith before the days of His ministry, and for whom His atonement then became available (1 Peter iii. 19). If to our blunted feelings, sinful as we all are, sin in its deformity is very painful, how much more to the pure Being who came to atone for it, *God with us*.

Our interest in this subject does not terminate here. For if it be true that He has done all this, for us men and for our salvation, we must remember that He has expressed His desire that they, in whose behalf He suffered, may be with Him in His glory. "Father," said He, "I will that they whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am." (John xvii. 24). Again He said, "Where I am, there shall my servant be." (John xii. 26). None but a pure and holy Being could breathe such a prayer, or could any have a right to see it granted, but He that had made a sufficient atonement :—*God with us*.

And again, brethren, remember that He, of whom we speak, has not ceased to be *God with us*. Since He first,

by His Incarnation, acquired the right to that title, He has indeed *died*—but He has also *risen*—and afterwards, after renewing in His risen Body the example of a perfect Man, has ascended up into Heaven, from whence He will one day return, with power and great glory. But in the meantime, though we see Him not, He is still with us. He declared to His disciples, that where two or three were gathered in His Name, He was in the midst of them. In this Church therefore, He is with us. And further, in the same night that He was betrayed, He took bread, and said in mysterious language, “This is My Body, do this in remembrance of Me” (Matt. xxvi. 26) : explaining thus by His words and actions the still more mysterious expressions used long before at the Synagogue of Capernaum, “Whoso eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood, hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For he that eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood dwelleth in Me, and I in Him” (John vi. 54-56). In this sense also He is with us. For we have either communicated this morning, or hope to do so immediately—thus laying claim to the fulfilment of His gracious promise !

Shall we not then look forward to the fulfilment of His other gracious promise, which took, as we have seen already, the form of a prayer to His Father ? (John xvii. 24) —and hope, as He is with us now, where we are, we may hereafter be with Him, where He now is ?” “God with us,” is the description of our position *now* : “We with God,” will be the description *then*. “*Ever with the Lord,*”

S. Paul says (2 Thess. iv. 17) when He wishes to sum up the highest blessedness of Saints above.—O that among that blessed company even the meanest place may be ours ! O that our passage thither may be sinless, shameless, and if it please Him, painless !

Let us also remember, that as Jesus set a child in the midst of His disciples, and bid them remember that except as little children they could not enter into His kingdom : so He also placed His own childhood in our view, as the pattern of a holy childhood upon earth. Pray we that the childhood of our little ones may be like His—and strive we to set them such an example, and give them such training, as may nurture the heavenly seed, which He has sown in them, that so they may grow up better, holier, happier, than their parents, however saintly those parents may be : conformed to the human image of Him who was *God with us*.

And if, at this season of the year, there be one point in which we should seek to follow His example, let it be *compassion*. His compassion for the human race brought Him from the Heavens ;—and as He went about doing good, it was His compassion, as we learn from the words of inspiration, that led to the performance of His many acts of mercy. (Lam. iii. 22, Matt. xx. 34, Mark v. 19, Heb. v. 2.)

Let us, in like manner, be compassionate to our fellow creatures, tender-hearted and loving, even as He was. And it may be that a few of the acts of compassion that

you do, may, like those of Cornelius, (Acts x. 4) be registered in Heaven. That He, who is *God with us*, and desires us to be *with God*, will deign at length to greet you among those blessed of His Father, who, in shewing tenderness to their poorer and more afflicted brethren, shall be counted as having shewn mercy unto Him who is *God with us*.

SERMON III.

LAST NIGHT OF THE YEAR.

PSALMS XXX. V.

"Heaviness may endure for a night."

THERE IS as great a contrast between *this night*, and the *morning* to which we hope it will lead us, as between the former and latter clauses of the verse that I have just read. To the former I wish to draw your attention *now*, that I may the more appropriately open before you the latter part, when we meet in God's House to-morrow to welcome the new year. "Heaviness," or, as our Bible Version gives it, "*weeping*, may endure *for a night*:" and we may especially say, *for this night*: for we are no doubt all of us assembled in a serious mind. We have escaped from the world and its fascinating society, which would

make the last hours of the closing year a season of revelry, that we may spend a little time, as it were, alone with God. We have come here to keep our NEW YEAR'S EVE, as our Prayer Book calls it, to commune with our own heart, and to be still :—and it may well be, that we feel somewhat solemnized by the scene and its surroundings.

We look backward, and what do we see? the tangled thread of many designs, which once looked very orderly, as we laid them out a year ago. Some of these we have, from mere lack of time, been obliged to leave for the present unaccomplished, though we hope to take them up again to-morrow, and, by God's blessing, bring them at length to a happy conclusion. But even upon these, it is very possible, God's blessing was not so specially asked as it should have been, either in the outset or while they were in progress : or else they might have been by this time more complete than they are. Still, in regard to these, it is not too late now to humble ourselves before Him, and to entreat that He will yet take them under His guidance, if they be consistent with His Holy Will.

Other designs, we confess, that we have left incomplete from mere indolence, or vacillation of purpose. We entered upon them with lively interest, and were for some time full of self-congratulation on the progress that we seemed to make in them. But gradually difficulties gathered round us, the freshness of our pleasure in doing such work passed away, and we dropped the designs altogether.

This is, I have no doubt, the confession of many

amongst us: we have desisted from some self-imposed task without any sufficient reason: without having discovered that it was either displeasing to God, injurious to our own spiritual interest, or hurtful to our neighbour: we have simply been weary, and have turned away from work which no one urged us to undertake. For this infirmity we have to humble ourselves before God, and submit our plans to Him, with the entreaty that he will mercifully direct us, as to the expediency of resuming what we have laid aside;—and in case we see our way to so doing, we have to ask of Him also the strength to persevere.

Other designs very possibly we have laid aside with reason, because we found they were leading us away from God and from our duty. We commenced them without sufficient thought, without considering whither they were likely to conduct us, and we soon found, to our disappointment, that they were very different in their tendency to what we had expected. We have, therefore, very properly broken them off as soon as possible, and now look back with shame and contrition upon the hours we wasted upon them, and it may be, even upon the harm that they may have done to others: a harm for which we deeply accuse ourselves, and which we must endeavour as far as possible to repair. Surely such a retrospect as this is enough to make this night a time of heaviness to many of us.

Nor is this all. There may be not a few who have cause to deplore not merely designs, which they thought

to be good, and found to be far otherwise ; but actual sins, which they have committed, perhaps even courses of sin on which they have embarked, against light and knowledge, with a full sense of the guilt of what they did, but under the overpowering tide of passion, or in the sordid calculation of self-interest. Of these we have, I hope, been led in the course of the year, by God's mercy, to repent : and to turn away with loathing from the very memory of them. But though this be so, by God's grace, and though we thoroughly believe that such sins, being repented of, confessed, and abandoned, have obtained the pardon of Almighty God, yet it cannot but be painful, in this quiet season of reflection, to look back upon them, and to accuse even our repentance of not being deep enough. O how humbly, in such cases, do we appropriate the mercy of the Father revealed in Christ our Saviour, and say with the Prodigal, " I have sinned against Heaven and before Thee, and am not worthy to be called Thy son, and welcomed home to Thy love."

In regard to these, it has formed part of our devotion in this holy House to-night, to pray that we be not led again into temptation, but be delivered from evil ; that one result of our sad experience may be found in our desire to guard others, who may be standing on the very brink of the temptation to which we ourselves have yielded, and from which we have been saved as it were by fire (1 Cor. xiv. 15).

And then, perhaps, there are many things, which we have thanked God for being able to do, and to persevere

in doing, up to this time. We see of what use they have been to ourselves : we know the good that they have done to our neighbours, and we hope to continue them, if God permit, with unabated energy. But in this quiet time, while we have been examining ourselves, it may well have appeared to us that the actions, on which we have been disposed to applaud ourselves, and for which the world has praised us, have been by no means so exemplary as we had imagined. There has been some self-sufficiency in our planning of them, some desire of the world's approval in our performance of them, which have sadly spoiled them, and may even have placed them rather on the list of sins than of good deeds. For these, therefore, we have to confess our sinfulness and imperfection ; and although we may have arrived at a knowledge of some of the defects, with which our performance of them has been encompassed, we have still to cry to Him who is the Searcher of all hearts, " Who can tell how oft he offendeth ! O cleanse thou me from secret faults." (Ps. xix. 12.)

And even beyond this, there may appear to most of us need of further self-humiliation, because, on reviewing the past year, we have now discovered many things that we might have done, and yet have not. These are not things which occurred to us at the time, and were wilfully put aside ; but things not thought of when we had the opportunity of doing them, yet which now we clearly see that we might have attempted, and might have been blessed in

the endeavour. In regard to these, we are now ready to take up the words of the self-convicted Patriarchs concerning Joseph: "We are verily guilty concerning our Brother." O that his blood may not be upon us, because of our sinful carelessness! O that there may not be other instances of such neglect yet to be discovered. "Try us, O Lord, and seek the ground of our hearts, prove us, and examine our thoughts: look well if there be any way of wickedness in us, and lead us in the way everlasting." (Psalm cxxxix. 23, 24).

But why do all these things come back so painfully upon us as to make this a night of heaviness? For many reasons, brethren, I believe, both in regard to our duty towards our neighbour, and our duty towards the just and holy God, in whose sight we have endeavoured to place ourselves. And if we were compelled to think of God simply as just and holy, the sins of commission and omission, of which I have now spoken, might well drive us to despair. Who could bring a clean thing out of an unclean? who could enable us guilty creatures to raise our heads in the presence of One who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity? who could encourage us to try yet again to do better in another year, if one be granted us?

But thanks be to God, we have no reason to despair—He is as merciful as He is just, and He has devised the means, whereby He may be just, and yet the Justifier of sinners, like ourselves. He, the Father of our Lord Jesus

Christ, has sent that Holy Son to take upon Him our nature, to suffer and to die for us. And for His sake it is that we hope for forgiveness. Nay, and more than this, He has sent down His Holy Spirit, co-eternal with Himself, to purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. It is through Him, as we believe, that we have been led to feel our exceeding sinfulness, to sigh after better things, and in some degree to perform them.

In these considerations we have great and unspeakable comfort. But yet, even in these, we see fresh reason for weeping, on this night of retrospection. We reflect with shame that we have sinned against *love*, not merely against *power*—that we have, as it were, shut love out, and might well be shut out from love. Here is our deepest cause of grief. That we have not returned with adequate love, with a love that might have ensured the keeping of God's law, the love of the Father, the love of the Son, and the love of the Holy Ghost. The love of the Father, that induced Him to plan from all eternity the salvation of man, to work out His plan throughout a succession of ages, and at length, in the fulness of time, to send His Son into the world made of a woman, to suffer and to die for us, in the perfectness of man's nature. The love of the Son, in accepting His Father's gracious appointment, and submitting to be born, as at this time, of a pure Virgin; to live on earth in all the weakness of man's nature, sin only excepted; to bear the scorn and contumely of those whom He came to save; to die upon the Cross

the only guiltless death the world has seen, and by that death to conquer him that had the power of death. The love of the Holy Ghost, in waiting for the consummation of the mystery of Christ's redemption of the world, and then descending, on the day of Pentecost, to inspire and sanctify the Redeemed.

All this love, the love of the Three Holy Persons of the One adorable Godhead, we have outraged by our want of love :—inasmuch as every sin we have committed, every good deed we have omitted, is an offence against such wondrous love.

Let us only remember what love has been shown in our Baptism, by the Father in adopting us, the Son in justifying us, the Holy Ghost in sanctifying us : what holy beings ought we to have been, so adopted, so justified, so sanctified ! Let us remember what privileges we have had, in the catechising of our infant years, in the ordinances of public worship, in the study of God's holy Word, and the explanation of it in the congregation ! Let us then remember how great has been the privilege of being brought especially near to Christ in His Holy Communion, sustained by those precious Elements, which are the source of spiritual strength to those who worthily partake them ! Let us recall the glorious example of the humble and faithful lives of many, who have lived among us, perhaps in our own family, or at least in our immediate circle, who set forth the beauty of holiness in their lives, and glorified their Saviour in their peaceful deaths. Let

us think upon the good resolutions which we formed to follow them, as they followed their Lord, and the immeasurable distance at which we have been left behind them !

All this, I say, is matter of mournful reflection for us in these last moments of the waning year. But blessed be God—"Heaviness such as this may endure for a night only"—joy is to come in the morning. We have, in the course of the evening prayer to-night, made one solemn confession, that we have left undone what we ought to have done, and done what we ought not to have done : and that there is no health, no means of recovering soundness, in ourselves. "But Thou, O Lord," we have cried, "have mercy upon us !" And we have then received with breathless interest, and appropriated in our heart of hearts, the absolving words, spoken in the name of God by His minister.

And now, after a short and solemn pause, we hope to draw near and take the Holy Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, to our comfort :—as the first act of the new year : the first appropriation of the religious joy that is promised us. We shall approach the Father with all humility, knowing our own unworthiness, making first, in the course of the Communion Office, a fresh confession, in token of our closer self-examination, and deeper penitence. And oh the joy that it will be to feel ourselves accepted in the Beloved, allowed to draw near once more to Him, who was made very

Man without spot of sin, to make us clean from all sin.

To-morrow, if it please God, that we be then once more united in this Holy House for morning prayer at eleven o'clock, I will endeavour to take up the other words of our text, "Joy cometh in the morning"—and I trust that the joy of a new year may be sanctified by a sense of the Presence among us of Him, who as on that day in submitting to the first ordination of the law, first shed for us His precious Blood !

SERMON IV.

NEW YEAR'S DAY.

Festival of the Circumcision.

PSALM XXX. 5.

"Joy cometh in the morning."

TRULY, brethren, with every morning, joy cometh : the return of light, after a season of darkness, is refreshing under any circumstances, and is felt even by those who languish under disease, or crouch under human tyranny. But how much more joyful than any other morning is the first of a new year ! We wake up, from short but refreshing sleep, after having, on the conclusion of the old year, confessed our faults, promised, with God's help, to amend our life for the future, and, as the first act after midnight, set the seal to the fidelity of our intention,

in the reception of the Holy Communion. This, brethren, you have, many of you, done : and I trust that you have now re-entered God's courts with joy.

During the night of the world's history, which preceded the dayspring granted from on high, in the Incarnation of the Lord Jesus, men were accustomed to make the first day of the New Year a day of mere revelry and animal enjoyment. But the Christian Church, while accepting from the world the custom of rejoicing in the New Year, endeavoured to sanctify its joy, by making it a *joy in the Lord*. Remembering that New Year's Day fell within a week of the great Festival of our Lord's Nativity, she appointed that it should be celebrated as the octave of Christmas, the day, that is to say, which, after a week's interval, was to be illuminated with a portion of the brightness that belonged to Christmas Day. And then, as if to give it a further significance, observing in a later age that this must have been, according to the Jewish custom, the day when a child born, as our Lord was, within the Covenant made with Abraham and his seed, would receive the seal of Circumcision, the Church appointed that this first day of the New Year should be kept in memory of the Circumcision of Jesus Christ.

He was come to be the Seed of the woman who should bruise the serpent's head : therefore it was necessary that He should be *born of woman*, though without sin. He was come to be the Seed of Abraham, in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed : therefore it was

necessary that He should comply with that covenant in the flesh, which was appointed to faithful Abraham. And Joseph and the Blessed Virgin Mother, mindful of the Law, were, as the Gospel tells us, careful that His Circumcision should take place when eight days were accomplished. On that occasion it was customary for the parents of a Jewish child to give him a name. The Lord Jesus had but one earthly Parent, the Virgin Mother : but He had a Heavenly Parent, God the Father, who had already appointed for the Babe a Name which was to be above every name : the Name of JESUS. An Angel had signified this before His miraculous conception ; and Joseph, as a faithful guardian of the Blessed Child, entrusted to His fostering care, could but carry out the command laid upon Him. There was no service in the Temple, no gathering of the elders of Israel, as some have fancied, to the Circumcision of the Royal Babe, whose Birth was to make Bethlehem great among the thousands of Judah. If there were any present beyond the immediate Holy Family, they must have been the humble shepherds, who had been summoned by an Angel to His manger bed, and perhaps the village elders of Bethlehem, called hastily together to witness the admission into the outward covenant of a Child, born in a stable, in the outskirts of their once famous but now fallen city. The scene in the Temple, when Simeon and Hannah bore inspired witness to the greatness of the Child, was at the Purification of the Holy Mother, many weeks afterwards,

when she and her Child were able to bear the short journey to the capital, and the long hasty flight into Egypt, to avoid the jealous malice of Herod, stirred against the Child by the witness of the Eastern wise men, and the confirmatory word of the Jewish scribes and elders, that the expected Messiah was to be born at Bethlehem.

On the day that we now commemorate, all was simple, quiet, unexciting : a village Child was circumcised in a village ; and yet in that event was commenced a course of obedience to the ceremonial Law, which, when complete, should make that Law in future needless. The Blood which should be the Propitiation for the sins of the world was first shed, and the pattern of complete obedience on earth to a Heavenly Father's Will was first displayed.

Let us then consider the causes that we, as Christians, have for rejoicing in this day. We have seen that by Circumcision our Saviour was admitted to the responsibilities of the chosen seed of Abraham, from whom, according to the flesh, He sprung. And S. Paul says, "He that is circumcised is a debtor to do the whole Law" (Gal. v. 3). He took upon Him this obligation, and fulfilled it to the utmost, leaving no jot or tittle unaccomplished, and thus was able to free those who from the Gentiles should believe in His Name, from the necessity of assuming a yoke which, as S. Peter says, the Jews were themselves unable to bear (Acts xv. 10). How glorious the gift of this freedom is to us ! what cause for joy have we in the assertion of it, in the freedom from

ceremonial ordinances, to serve our God in Spirit and in Truth?

But again, we have seen that at His Circumcision our Lord received the *Name*, of which the Angel, who commanded that it should be given Him, declared, "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins." (Matt. i. 21.) The Jewish hero, Joshua, a name which the Greeks were accustomed to write Jesus, (Acts vii. 45, Heb. iv. 8), saved the people of Israel, by a succession of battles, from the idolatrous tribes of Canaan; and his name, therefore, was frequently given by pious Jews to their children, in the hope that they might tread in that faithful warrior's footsteps, and be in some way deliverers of their countrymen. But it was no fancy of an earthly parent in this case, to give the name of *Jesus*, or *Joshua*, to the Babe of Bethlehem. An Angel brought the divine command that He should be called JESUS, and assigned the appropriate reason: "For He shall save His people." And this He did, like the Joshua of old, by defeating the banded armies of the arch-enemy of men's souls, vanquishing him repeatedly in hand to hand encounter, as in the Wilderness, at Gethsemane, and on Calvary, thus leading captivity captive, and receiving gifts for men.

And we, brethren, are among His people who are thus saved. We have been made members already of His mystical Body, children of His Heavenly Father, inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven, which He has purchased

with His own Blood. Does not, then, joy come to us this morning, the morning on which His initiation into the legal covenant took place, the morning on which He was ceremonially devoted to the task of saving His people from their sins? I know not whether any day in the whole year be so suggestive of subjects of joy as this, considered in what we may call a Christian point of view.

But is there, it will be said, any other than a *Christian* point of view, from which we can regard it? Yes, there doubtless is the *secular* notion, as it may be called, of its being the first day of a new year, the re-commencement, as it were, of the plans that we have been engaged in during the past year, and the opportunity of re-considering them in what appears a new light. For is it not a new light, in which we regard them, when we are turning our back upon the past, with all its shadows, and looking forward to the future, as it gleams in the first sunshine of another year?

Another year! some of us perhaps have hardly ventured to hope for another: and we all, I trust, have been acting on the admonition of the prophet (Hag. i. 5), considering our ways, and setting our houses in order (2 Kings xx. 1), with the view of meeting our God, if he should call us to account. We know that He will do so *some day*, and why should we not therefore act as if that day were close at hand.

Let me hope, then, that in the determination to live each day as if it were to be your last, you have formed

good resolutions for the year that is before you, or that you will not long delay to do so. For it is much to be deplored that any should live in a vague aimless way, taking things as they come, and making no preparation to meet them.

Let me suppose that there is some one here, who is conscious that in time past he has led a bad life, it matters not in what respect, but that of that life he has heartily repented, and been assured that he is forgiven. Let him not then begin the year with a sense of the load of past sin being still upon him, and requiring to be in some way atoned for: the only possible atonement is already made—Christ has allowed the weight of the accumulated guilt of mankind to be laid upon *Him*, and has granted full and free pardon to each particular sinner, who seeks it at His hands. Let the forgiven penitent rejoice in his freedom, rejoice in the knowledge that God will impute his past sin to him no more; and labour, during the time that may remain, to guard others from the like sin.

For this there will be opportunity enough from day to day; and the discernment of the danger of others is one of the fruits of one's own past fall. Such a one need not expect rapture, but may at least aspire to the joy of contentment; he may endeavour to serve God in humble thankfulness, until the end shall come; when it may be that he shall be able to present himself before God's judgment seat, not alone, but accompanied by those whom he has guarded from harm and guided unto salvation.

Another there may be, who has met with unkindness and disappointment, and has suffered much during the year that is past. Let not the memory of this interfere with the happiness of the present. Let him seek from God the strength to love and to forgive.

Another has been perplexed with religious doubts. But God has provided some friend who has solved them, and he commences the year with peace in believing. Let him beware of the errors which have led him in past time into perplexity, and trust God for the future, accepting in meek faith that which He has revealed, and refusing to allow the evil one to cavil at God's words, as he did with our first parent in Paradise. "Yea, hath God said?" (Gen. iii. 1.) was his way of tempting Eve: "He hath said," is our answer—"And what though we understand not at present all His mysteries, we are sure that He will reveal to us as much of them as is good for us, in due time.

Another has suffered losses in worldly circumstances, and is apprehensive of further difficulties. If only he has not swerved from the path of uprightness, but has endeavoured to use the means which God has given him, he need not fear for the future. God may not design that he should be rich: riches are not an unmingled blessing. But if He be duly served, He will not suffer His servant to want. David's experience is that of many an aged saint in the present day. "I have been young, and now am old: and yet saw I never the righteous forsaken, or

his seed begging their bread." (Psalm xxxvii. 25). Let him rejoice in this assurance, and commit his way unto the Lord. (Ps. xxvii. 5, Prov. xvi. 3.)

Another may be overpowered with business cares and perplexities,—and scarcely know which way to turn. Let him resolve to let none of these troubles interfere with his service of God :—never to give up, for supposed want of time, the practice of daily devotion, never to let the calm of the Lord's day be so broken by the world's duties as to keep him back from the sanctuary. God will enable him to keep his resolution ; and he will find joy in the execution of it.

Another there may be, whose health is failing him, and who fears that his strength will not be sufficient for his daily toil. His fear may be well-grounded. God may perhaps make it impossible for him to do so much now as formerly. But submission to this must be his discipline, and it will be blessed in the end. Only let him beware of giving way too soon, of selfishly fancying himself unequal to duties which are really quite within his power. A faithful effort will possibly, by God's blessing, be successful ; and the labours of many an invalid have often been more blessed than those of the vigorous and hearty.

Another may be conscious of the creeping on of time, and may doubt whether another year of life be likely to be granted him. Be it so ;—I answer—suppose this to be the last year you have to live, why should you lay aside any of those duties which you are still able to discharge ? When you

must give way, do it with a good grace, and help by your experience your youthful successors. But while you can still work, work on, and that in such a way that it will be easy for another to take the reins, when you are obliged to drop them from your failing hands. Work thus for the present year, or it may be for many years, if God give you the strength, and you will not have cause to regret your perseverance. It will be your joy to be of some use in your generation, while you are here, and to look forward to rest and peace in that blessed kingdom above, wherein are joys at God's right hand for evermore.

But I must not give too sombre a tone to these New Year's thoughts. There are many, who are simply full of joy and health, exulting in their strength and vigour, enjoying what God has given, and gratefully looking forward to the continuance of it. Think you that I would check such joy? No, far from it. I would only add, "*rejoice in the Lord.*" (Phil. iv. 4) Let not Him be excluded from your thoughts and counsels; sanctify your joy by early devotion in the morning, and by careful self-examination at night. There are few wiser words of Solomon than these: "Rejoice, O young man, in the days of thy youth,"—if only they be balanced with what he says at the end of the same verse—"But know thou, that for all these things God will call thee into judgment." (Eccles. xi. 9.) If we only remember this, our joy will not be likely to betray us into sin.

Even our Saviour's life was not altogether a joyless one.

We can well imagine the cheerfulness of His childhood, and we can trace that of His manhood, even in the midst of His unexampled sorrows. None but a *cheerful* Man would have taken part in the festivities of the rustic Wedding at Cana. (John ii. 1.) None but a *cheerful* Man was likely to be misrepresented as "gluttonous and a winebibber," (Mat. xi. 17)—foul reproaches, and manifestly undeserved. None but a *cheerful* Man would have allowed the children to gather round Him, as He did. (Mat. xix. 13, xxi. 15). Nor is it without object that it is said of Him, "In that hour Jesus *rejoiced in Spirit*, and said, "I thank Thee, O Father." (Luke x. 21.)

Yes, Brethren, let us rejoice as He rejoiced, be thankful as He was thankful ; and may the year which we this day commence, be a happy because a holy one to us all ! Let heaviness be dismissed with the night that is past ; for joy is come to us this morning.

SERMON V.

ASH WEDNESDAY.

The Commination Service.

PSALM CXIX. 21.

“Thou hast rebuked the proud: and cursed are they that do err from Thy Commandments.”

THIS, brethren, is the text which the Church supplies us to-day, in its comment upon the general sentences of God's cursing against impenitent sinners, gathered out of the 27th chapter of Deuteronomy, the 17th chapter of Jeremiah, and various well-known passages of the New Testament. For you will remember, that when these terrible sentences had all been repeated, and you had given your solemn assent to them, the Minister went on to say, in the exhortation following: “Now seeing that all they are accursed, as the Prophet David beareth witness,

who do err and go astray from the commandments of God, let *us* return unto our God with all contrition and meekness of heart."

Yes, brethren, the repetition of those sentences formed no uncharitable denunciation of others, as some have strangely imagined, but rather a humble acknowledgment of the justice of God's anger against ourselves, so far as we have brought ourselves under the description given of obstinate offenders against God. There has been no wish or prayer expressed that *so it may be*; as though it were written in the Communion Service—*cursed be* the sinners there described:—but a plain statement that *cursed are* such offenders. Cursed, that is to say, if they have not turned from their sin, "confessing their offences, and seeking to bring forth worthy fruits of *penitence*." I am not putting any strained sense upon this time-honoured service, but simply setting before you its *very words*, varying but one, which is also varied in our present Bible translation of S. John's words (Mat. iii. 2, 8), and substituting *penitence* or *repentance* for the old expression, *penance*. And even that word I have varied, only because the two words, once identical in meaning, have in modern usage been distinguished. For *Penance*, as you are aware, is often now employed to denote a punishment inflicted on the penitent: whereas the original Greek word used by the holy Baptist, and the translation of it in our present authorised version, certainly imply a change of heart.

We no more condemn others by repeating God's curses

on Ash Wednesday, than we do by repeating God's Ten Commandments every Sunday. In each case we acknowledge their justice, we confess our own sinfulness, we declare our penitence, and we ask for power to serve God better for the time to come. And who shall say that this is not a proper occupation for us all to-day ?

It is, no doubt, a painful duty, to read such severe sentences, and to respond, *Amen*, to each : but this is one of the ways in which God rebukes our pride, to use the words of the text, and teaches us not to be high-minded, but to fear. Some, perhaps, of the faults which are enumerated in the black catalogue, are not likely to have been committed by members of a Christian congregation such as ours. But even these are properly rehearsed, in order to suggest to us all the depth of degradation, of which our human nature is capable, from which, however, God has mercifully kept us back. Nor let it be supposed that only Moses and the ancient Prophets made these vigorous denunciations of guilty men. The most comprehensive of all the sentences to which you have said *Amen*, is drawn from the words of S. Paul. That Apostle expressly says, that such men as can be thus described cannot inherit the Kingdom of God : and then adds, for the comfort of those whom He addresses, as I do for your comfort also : " Such *were* some of you : but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified, in the Name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor. vi. 9-11).

What does it, therefore, remain for you to do, but to renew from day to day your repentance, and to press forward more eagerly to perfection (Heb. vi. 1), to the more complete realising of the likeness of Christ Jesus? To examine yourselves, whether your repentance is sincere, and whether it has borne the appropriate fruit of a sincere amendment of life? Most of you have some manual for self-examination; or if you have not, the Ten Commandments will furnish you with one. One caution, however, let me give you, not to dwell upon the details of past offences—not to think it necessary to write down, or to communicate by word of mouth to others, that of which you are heartily ashamed. To God these painful details are all known; and they need be communicated to no other. And let your sensitiveness to the evil of your past ways shew itself especially in rescuing others from similar danger, and bringing them to like repentance, not to be repented of.

Again; let me caution some against inflicting upon themselves any needless bodily pains and troubles, as if they thought that by them God could be propitiated. So thoroughly Pagan an idea ought never to have a place in a Christian's thoughts. The self-denial of a Christian is not intended to punish his body, in which, and with which, he has offended; but to bring it into subjection, lest it should again rebel against God's law. The supposed asceticism, which weakens the body, and renders it less able to serve God, nay, and even affects the mind also, eventually, with a fatal lethargy and indolence,

leading in some cases even to the loss of reason, is quite inconsistent with the notion of Evangelical repentance. Such practices often do but estrange the heart from God, instead of drawing it nearer to Him.

Notice, however, the wisdom of the Church in early ages, in giving us not one particular day of humiliation, but a season rather, consisting, as you are aware, of forty days, of which this is the first, during which we have time to take the warning of the Prophet, and consider our ways. (Haggai i. 5, 7.) And few seasons are likely to be more really profitable, than a Lent rightly observed according to the rational usage of the Church of England.

The very custom of the world, in being less lavish of its invitations, will give you a little more time for yourselves, for your poor neighbours and for God. Endeavour then so to use it : be more earnest and regular in prayer and in the study of the Scriptures ;—and use whatever means the Church or its Ministers supply you with, for so doing. The House of God is more frequently open :—attend its services. More sermons are preached, and their subjects are more systematically arranged :—endeavour to follow up the various courses. It may be that attendance on a Bible class is within your reach, where the knowledge and experience of others may be used for your advantage :—neglect not the opportunity. You may already have taken part in Sunday School teaching, or district visiting :—devote yourselves more earnestly to such work,—or if you have not yet tried, seek now an

occasion of doing so. You may already perhaps have contributed of your means to some charitable objects :—perhaps your previous self-denial will enable you to do more, and you will find God's blessing rest upon the attempt. In short, there are a thousand ways, in which you can, without needlessly attracting the attention of your neighbours, serve God better, and be more useful to other members of Christ's Body, than you have before.

Yet, though we must beware of attracting the attention of others, doing things, that is, to be seen of men, (Matt. vi. 1) we must not be ashamed of what we are doing, and scrupulously conceal it, or even disavow it, as some young Christians have been tempted to do. Far from it, we must not be afraid to let our light shine before men, if the result of that shining may be the leading others to glorify, not us, but our Father which is in heaven (Matt. v. 16). Let our Lord Jesus Christ be our pattern, who fulfilled all righteousness : complied with all the duties of that law which He came to fulfil, went about doing good, and glorified in all things Him that sent Him into the world. Pray we for the influence of God the Holy Spirit, to teach us the right way, in which we may tread in our Saviour's blessed steps, and be at length partakers of the kingdom that He has purchased for us.

So far I have spoken to the willing and obedient. Just a word now to those who are at present careless about the welfare of their souls. There are likely to be very few present here who are theoretical unbelievers—very few

who deny the truth of Scripture, and the claims of Christianity. But there may be some, who practically disregard the things, which with their lips they have acknowledged—who put off to a more convenient season the observance of what they know to be their duty. To these then let me address the intreaty that they will delay no longer. That they will regard the proclamation of the present Lenten Season as a message of God to them,—as an opportunity of repentance and amendment, such as they never may find again. How many have been cut off since last Ash Wednesday came round ! How many, who were then in full health and spirits !—how many who had deferred the time of their intended seriousness in religion, and never made the change that they designed ! Take to yourselves, ye careless ones, if there be any present, the warnings of our Commination Service, and seek ye the Lord while He may be found. (Isaiah lx. 6.)

SERMON VI.

L E N T .

The Fast that God hath Chosen.

ISAIAH LVIII. 6, 7.

“Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free? and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked that thou cover him? and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?”

ASSEMBLED as we are on one of the days of the solemn season of Lent, we can hardly find a more appropriate subject of meditation than is presented in our text. It has been observed that the fifty-eighth chapter of Isaiah contains a homily, which was very probably delivered on the great day of Atonement; and the fifty-ninth, a

humble acknowledgment of the people's sins. Just such a homily, just such a confession, our Church provides for us in the well known Communion Service, in which we have lately taken our part at the commencement of the Lenten Season.

Let us glance at a few of the points which are suggested by Isaiah's inspired homily. The Prophet assures us that he is bidden to cry aloud, and not spare any who deserves reproof; just as S. Paul, in writing to the Corinthians (2 Cor. xiii. 2), says, in discharge of his appointed duty: "If I come again, I will not spare." He will show God's people their transgressions, and the house of Israel their sins. He anticipates their remonstrance, as if it were unnecessary for him to address them thus, when they are already making every demonstration of repentance: and he therefore acknowledges that they seek God daily, and make a profession of their delight to know His ways: that they ask of the Prophet ordinances of justice, and seem to count it a pleasure to approach God: that they even go so far as to say in their hearts, "Wherefore, O God, have we fasted, and Thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and Thou takest no knowledge?" In this remonstrance they are citing the very words of the Law, from the 16th chapter of Leviticus—"In the seventh month, the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls." And it is as though our Lord Himself gave them an answer out of the Holy place of His Temple, or the Holiest of all in

Heaven : " Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labours." So far from humbling your soul, ye gratify it : ye break off your own worldly employment to attend on the solemn offices of the Temple, but ye demand at the same time the fulfilment of their appointed labours from the unhappy bondsmen whom ye keep under the yoke. And yet, what said the Law which they had just cited from Leviticus ? " And *this* shall be a statute for ever unto you : that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourneth among you." (xvi. 29)

Here was surely a special provision for the resting from work even of strangers : much more then of their countrymen who might, in payment of their debts, have become slaves until the year of Jubilee.

But forgetful of all this, the Jewish nobles and wealthy citizens frequented the Temple, and seem to have exulted in feeling that in the meantime their bondsmen were, for their advantage, still engaged in servile labours. Could they then expect that the cry of their devotion would be heard with acceptance on high, when at the same time the cry of the oppressed was entering into the same gracious Ears ? Could they expect that the Lord would look with approval upon the sight of the upper ten thousand of His people, bowing their heads throughout His Temple courts, like bulrushes that stoop before the passing wind, putting sackcloth on their shoulders, and

spreading ashes under them, echoing the mournful Litany of the Priests, who stood between the Porch and the Altar, "Spare Thy people, O Lord, and give not Thy heritage to reproach:" (Joel ii. 17)—while from the adjoining fields and workshops the cry of the oppressed was rising up to heaven?"

Surely this inconsistency was too glaring, and stamped with the brand of hypocrisy what otherwise might have been an acceptable service. "Wilt thou," says God, by the voice of His Prophet, "call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh."

These words were designed to teach the important lesson spoken elsewhere by Hosea (vi. 6), that "God would have mercy, and not sacrifice." That He would regard with complacency no ritual observances, which were not shown to be genuine by an enlarged spirit of charity and temperance.

And just so is it with our Services in God's house to-day, and with any other additional religious observances with which we mark our Lent Season. They give no satisfaction to the Almighty Searcher of hearts, if they

are not the expression of a willing heart, full of self-reproach for its past ingratitude to God ;—full of thankfulness for having been so repeatedly forgiven ;—full of the ardent desire to benefit others, for the sake of Him who has loved us and given Himself for us.

There appears to have been much outward display of ascetic self-denial on the part of the Jews on their one great national Fast day. Our Saviour, when, in the Sermon on the Mount, He touched upon the subject of Fasting, put His disciples on their guard against some of these displays, saying, “ Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance : for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily, I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face ; that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret : and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly” (Matt. vi. 16-18.) Let such then, brethren, be our fast : whatever mortifications we may find it expedient to use, let them, if possible, meet no eyes but that of God. Let us be watchful over our temper, lest men should have cause to say that religion has soured us. Let us be watchful over our self-denial, lest it become a means of enriching us : watchful over our almsgiving, lest it become a means of pompous display. In all things let us endeavour to approve ourselves to Him that seeth in secret, that He may, if He will, reward us openly.

For after all, what have we to be rewarded for? Have we not lately, in that truly Evangelical Form, used on the first day of this penitential season, confessed ourselves miserable sinners, deserving of God's wrath, and appealing only to His mercy? Have we not listened to the declaration of His curses, and said *Amen* to each, as acknowledging that it is possible for us to incur them, and that if we do so we are justly condemned? Surely we have done this: and then afterwards with our mouth have echoed the humble cry: "Turn thou us, O good Lord, and so shall we be turned. Be favourable, O Lord, be favourable to Thy people, who turn to thee in weeping, fasting, and praying. For thou art a merciful God, full of compassion, long-suffering, and of great pity. Thou sparest when we deserve punishment, and in Thy wrath thinkest upon mercy. Spare Thy people, good Lord, spare them, and let not Thine heritage be brought to confusion. Hear us O Lord, for Thy mercy is great, and after the multitude of Thy mercies look upon us; Through the merits and mediation of Thy blessed Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen."

In the remembrance of these our own words, let us spend our Lent: giving to God what time we can; doing what good we can to those who are round about us, and bringing them, as far as we are able, to do, what I hope most of us have done already,—to "acquaint themselves with God, and be at peace." (Job. xxii. 21.)

And especially, brethren, let this Lent be to us a sea-

son of real prayer. With all our profession of being a peaceful nation, we are engaged in constant little wars, in one or other of our many colonies and dependencies, of which it would be difficult to say that they are either necessary, or becoming to a Christian people. Be it our prayer that our great men may be guided in the performance of their duty to their country, and to the religion which they profess !

We call ourselves a well-governed nation : yet there exist among us dangerous classes, who acknowledge less the obligations of religion and the restraints of civil Society than the veriest barbarians. Be it our prayer, that such men may be restrained, and that their children may be educated in better principles than their parents !

We call ourselves a united nation, and yet there are among us terrible rivalries between class and class, which occasionally break out, in some of our chief commercial cities, into disagreements which resemble very much the struggles of civil war. Be it our prayer, that class distinctions may be gradually effaced, that employers may be more considerate, workpeople better informed, that both may live in harmony and godly love !

We call ourselves a Christian nation—but unfortunately our Christianity seems to display itself, outwardly at least, not in such loving union as Christ expects from His disciples, but rather in constant disunion and sub-division into sects, and parties, and denominations. Be it our prayer, that God will take from us all this spirit of dis-

union, and inspire His Church with the spirit of mutual forbearance, leading to peace, unity, and concord ! that we may with one mind and one mouth glorify the Father !

We call ourselves a domestic nation, but what constant disagreements arise in families, so as utterly to banish that one mind in a house which should characterise families in which the Son of peace is to be found. Be it our prayer, and our endeavour too, that such discords may be brought to an end.

We can all effect something, in our quiet way, if we will but take the opportunities that God's Providence has put before us.

Lastly, we call ourselves a religious nation—yet how little does our religion shew itself in Public Services. How often our own Church is open, and yet how few the worshippers ! Be it our prayer, not only that we may ourselves appropriate the blessings of public devotion, but that we may be able to bring others also to share them with us : and let this Lent be a proof of what we can do. So, when we call, may the Lord answer us ;—when we cry, may He graciously reply, “ Here I am.”

SERMON VII.

GOOD FRIDAY.

LAMENTATIONS III. 64—66.

“Render unto them a recompence, O LORD, according to the work of their hands. Give them sorrow of heart, Thy curse unto them. Persecute and destroy them in anger from under the heavens of the LORD.”

LUKE XXIII. 34.

“FATHER, FORGIVE THEM, FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO.”

THERE was a pious imagination on the part of many early Christians, of tracing in the sufferings of the Prophet Jeremiah a foreshadowing of those of the Lord Jesus. And hence they read, in the words of his Lamentations, the complaints which they too daringly conceived the Lord Himself to make. No doubt such a comparison,

devoutly made and cautiously carried out, may tend to edification. For there certainly are words of Jeremiah, which, though actually torn from him by the extremity of his suffering, go so far beyond its actual extent as only to have their full meaning in a far deeper anguish than he ever had to bear. Thus, for example, (Lam. i. 12) the well-known words: "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the Lord hath afflicted Me in the day of His fierce anger." No sorrow was ever like that which passers by beheld, when Christ was crucified on Calvary: though the full extent of that sorrow could certainly be tested by no mortal judgment, and could be paralleled with not even the most grievous agonies of any other child of man.

But even were the actual sufferings compared, there would remain a most astounding difference between the manner in which they were borne by the Prophet martyr of old, and by our Lord in the fulness of the time. Jeremiah writes a poem on his own sufferings and those of his down-trodden country:—he pursues the theme with every subtilty of thought, every quaintness of language: our Saviour surprised His persecutors, His judges, His executioners, by His dignified and solemn silence: saying not a word, except when His reserve might be misunderstood, "As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so opened He not His mouth." (Isaiah liii. 7.) And when His sense of duty compelled Him to address even the

man who was about to give Him over to the Cross, instead of exaggerating, He in a measure extenuated the tyrant's guilt, by saying, "He that delivered Me unto thee hath the greater sin." (John xix. 11.) Thus also, when outraged human feeling would in most cases have demanded utterance, either in strong contempt of the vulgar hands that stripped His pure Body, strained His delicate limbs, and by deliberate and repeated blows of a hammer, nailed Him to the Cross :—His simple words were these—"Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." (Luke xxiii. 24.)

Only contrast this prayer with the impassioned denunciation of Jeremiah (Lam. iii. 64—66), which you have heard in one of the lessons of the week : "Render unto them a recompense, O Lord, according to the work of their hands. Give them sorrow of heart, Thy curse unto them. Persecute and destroy them in anger from under the heavens of the Lord."

I do not draw this contrast, or invite you to follow it, in any spirit of depreciation of the man of God, who was in so many respects a worthy forerunner of the suffering Messiah (as indeed the Jews believed, when they saw, even in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, a prophetic narration of Jeremiah's sufferings). All I wish is that we should give each his proper place, and not, as too many do, even in the Christian Church, put into our Lord's Mouth, as His *Reproaches* of His people, the indignant words of a merely human sufferer.

Yet our Lord was indeed thoroughly human : as really human as was Adam, the progenitor of our race, when He came forth from the hands of His Creator. No refinement of human cruelty was lost upon His sensitive nature. Nay, we may even suppose that His sufferings were all the keener, from their incongruity with His perfect sinlessness. But it was His love for sinful men that had brought Him from His Father's right hand, to suffer for man : and how should HE then denounce to His Father's anger those whom He came to save ? How should HE call for the rendering of a recompence to those even who had richly deserved it ? How should HE call for the punishment even of the impious work of those cruel hands, that were so busily engaged about Him ? How should HE entreat for the infliction on them of any sorrow of heart, except the godly sorrow that worketh repentance ? How should HE invoke a curse, who came to save from curse and destruction those whose nature He had taken ? How was HE likely to pray for the persecution and dispersion under the heavens of that race in particular, over which He had wept, saying, " How often would I have gathered thy children together, but ye would not ! "

No, brethren, the day of grace was not yet over : He was still the Lamb : and not yet the vengeful Lion of the Tribe of Judah (Rev. v. 5). He still called men to repentance, instead of terrifying them by the simple denunciation of vengeance. And happily the time is not

even yet come, when men shall have to tremble before the "wrath of the Lamb." (Rev. vi. 16).

Putting aside then the natural utterance of Jeremiah's wounded spirit, who possibly was indignant, not so much for himself, as for the honour of God, which he considered to be insulted in the destruction of His Temple and the persecution of His Priests, let us now concentrate our attention on the prayer of the Lord Jesus. He is being attached to the Cross in the midst of those frightful tortures, which the Church has rehearsed to you to-day in the prophetic words of the Psalms, and in the historic record of the Gospel. The first words, which His parched lips after long silence utter, are these, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Father ! under what better title could He address Him, who is the Father, not merely of His Divine nature by Eternal Generation, but also that human nature which, as a second Adam, He had taken upon Himself?

Father ! by what more legitimate title could He address Him, when acting as a peacemaker between Him and His rebellious creatures : since, "Blessed," had He said, "are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God ?" (Matt. v. 9.)

Father ! what stronger claim could He make to be heard as a Son, than by acting out His own precept : (Mat. v. 44) "Pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you ; that ye may be children of the Father who is in Heaven ?"

What, then, is His Prayer? "Forgive them!"

Forgive those hireling soldiers, who are driving in the cruel nails, and those their companions, who are proposing to cast lots for His vesture.

Forgive those Roman authorities, who, personified in Pilate, have given Him over guiltless to a felon's cross!

Forgive those Jewish Rulers, collectively represented in Caiaphas, who, with the Scripture in their hand which might have guided them, have handed Him over to the Gentiles for a death which they dared not themselves inflict!

Forgive that Jewish multitude, who a few hours before had welcomed Him as a King come unto them in the Name of the Lord; and yet now had cried "Crucify Him! We have no King but Cæsar!"

Forgive those timid disciples, who but now had declared their readiness to go with Him to prison and to death, and yet had forsaken Him and fled!

It would require surely a high degree of heroism to refrain from stern invective against all these, and to regard them simply with contempt, as some dying Philosophers have treated the instruments of their death! But to pray for them! how far was that beyond the noblest flight of human patience!

Truly there was no fuller or more prevailing intercession than that which the Son of God breathed forth before His Father's Throne!

For indeed that prayer was heard : and that, we doubt not, on the very ground on which it was urged on the Almighty Father's ear :—Heard, on behalf of as many of each class prayed for as had the grace to turn, to repent, and to be saved.

The soldiers were represented in their centurion, who watched the crucified Sufferer with increasing wonder as the hours of pain slowly wore away, and cried at length at eventide, in the ears of His own soldiers, "Truly this was the Son of God ! (Matt. xxvii. 54.)

Of the Roman authorities, and of Pilate in particular, we know not enough to express more than a hope that in the Prætorium at Jerusalem, as afterwards in the emperor's court at Rome, some were found to own in Jesus, "Christ, the Power of God and the Wisdom of God." (1 Cor. i. 24)

Of the Jewish authorities, we know that there were some, who, like Joseph and Nicodemus, already were believers, but who, after this prayer, were strengthened to come forth and own their belief, and demand openly the mangled Corpse for honourable interment. Nor were there wanting, on the day of Pentecost, many of the same class, who on the appeal of S. Peter, were pricked to the heart, and came forward, crying, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" So numerous were these, that we find within a few weeks of the Crucifixion a great company of the Priests were obedient to the faith (Acts vi. 7).

And as for the Jewish multitude, who had clamoured for His death, so changed was their mood, that within a

few weeks they were rushing in crowds to Baptism, and continuing in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of Bread, and in prayers. Indeed, so highly did they now hold the memory of Him, whom they by wicked hands had crucified and slain, that the Apostles were not merely safe among them, but protected from the violence of the adverse section of the Rulers. (Acts. v. 26)

And more, the lately timid band of disciples, who had awhile forsaken their Master and God, like sheep without a shepherd, were now gathered again, ventured to enter the Temple at the hour of prayer, and had their regular meeting place there, in the Porch of Solomon, which seems never to have been left without the presence of some Christian Teacher. All this bears witness to the answering of the great Prayer that went up from the Altar of the Cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

And yet did they not know? Some of us might with Pharisaic severity reply, "Yes, they certainly did know, we cannot allow such a plea in their favour." Beware, brethren, lest by so saying you condemn yourselves. They did not know, or our Lord's prayer would not have availed them.

How should those rough soldiers know what they did, when they but executed the orders of their superiors, in their customary brutal manner?

How should Pilate know how great was the Prisoner he condemned? Something, indeed, He knew, enough

to make him guilty: but not enough, we hope, to leave him without excuse.

How should Caiaphas and his hypocritical crew know, blinded as they were by their hierarchical and party prejudices? Much they knew certainly, having the Holy Scriptures within their reach, but not enough, we trust, to make them sinners against the Holy Ghost, incapable of forgiveness.

How should the Jewish multitude know, accustomed as they were, to take their interpretation of God's word and their rule of duty from the lips of the Priests and scribes?

How should the humble Galilean disciples know, who had followed their Lord so long along the hard path of privation and contempt, and had thought at length that the day of His greatness was come, when they had conducted Him in triumph from Bethany to Jerusalem? Deep indeed and most natural was the disappointment, in which, after the dark hour of Gethsemane, they forsook Him and fled!

Truly, Brethren, every member of each of all these various classes, so far as he obtained mercy, obtained it in answer to our Saviour's Plea, "He knew not what he did!" obtained it, on the same ground as S. Paul at a later day was pardoned, because "He did it ignorantly in unbelief." (1 Tim. i. 13).

Our Saviour Himself had said, not many days before,

“ I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me.” (John xii. 32) He was now lifted up, and His precious Blood, shed upon the Altar of the Cross, was beginning to display its more than magnetic virtue. The Holy Spirit, not yet outwardly and overpoweringly given, was beginning to work in the hearts of the men, who within a few days would be appealing, under the stings of conscience, to those whom they had lately despised, “ Men and brethren, what shall we do ?” The Apostles had an answer ready, “ Repent and be baptized, every one of you, for the Remission of your sins : and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” (Acts ii. 37, 38).

If any of you, brethren, in like manner, are cut to the heart at the remembrance of past sins, more grievous far than those of any of that crowd, since they must have been committed against higher knowledge than that possessed by the best informed among them ; and in despite of the grace of the Holy Ghost, which in your Baptism has been freely bestowed on you already :—If any of you, conscious of your long neglect of Christ, or at best of your formal service of Him, feel now the attraction of His precious Blood, and venture to hope that the Words of the Cross were spoken for *you* : “ Father, forgive them ! they know not what they do :”—Delay not a moment to make your calling sure. *Now*, while it is called to-day, repent, appeal once more to the mercy pledged in that precious Bloodshedding. Plead once more the grace of your Baptism in which you were made Members

of Christ, the Children of God, and Members of that Kingdom which you have too long despised. Let not the picture which the services of this day have called up, and which our text we hope has imprinted on your conscience, be soon blotted from your remembrance. And what is that Picture, or rather that reality? It is the Figure of one hanging on a Cross: His Hands are stretched out to embrace the world, but held back by the nails driven into them for that world's sake; of One who, instead of denouncing His enemies in words like those of Jeremiah, prays rather for them, and among them for *you*, "Father, forgive them! they know not what they do!"

Who can say, whether after this day such a plea may ever be urged again in *your* behalf? Whether even the brief words you have heard to-day may not be *to you* the turning point of *knowledge*, after which it can no longer be pleaded that *you* know not what you do. *To-day* then, while it is called to-day, *harden not your hearts!*

But you, who sympathising with your Saviour now, are, as it were, crucified with Him on His Cross, *Rejoice with Him* that His suffering is *now at end*, and that He now sees the travail of His soul and is satisfied. Yet *Pray with Him* still, for those who still are as far from Him as they can be, who are crucifying Him afresh by grieving Him through their obstinate impenitence. *Weep with Him* this day, in remembrance of His Cross, and shew forth, as soon as you have the opportunity, His

death until He come, by accepting the symbols of His broken Body and His precious Blood. Bear upon your hearts, when you approach His table, the name and the memory of those for whom you are especially interested ; and in whom you would especially have Him interested *then*. Pray that the gross darkness or prejudice which keeps them from the knowledge of Him may be dissipated : and add your petition to His in their behalf—
“ Father forgive them : they know not what they do ! ”

SERMON VIII.

E A S T E R .

ROMANS VI. 1—5.

“What shall we say then? shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid! How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death? Therefore we are buried with Him by Baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His Resurrection.”

THERE is no event so characteristic of the History of the Founder of our Religion, as that which we commemorate this day, and, therefore, perhaps there is no festival in the Christian year so important as that of Easter. Proportionate to our sadness during the Holy week of Suffering

is our joy during the week of Resurrection on which we have now entered.

I need not point out how great and overpowering was the joy of the Disciples, when they were, almost against their will, convinced that their Lord was really risen. That His appearance among them was no phantom, as they at first had feared, but that His human Soul, after descending to the place of departed spirits, had really taken again that Body which had been treated with indignity in the Hall of Caiaphas, scourged in the Prætorium of Pilate, suspended on the Cross of Calvary, and at length deposited in the sepulchre of Joseph. That that Body was capable of all the functions that had belonged to it before death, and might be subjected to the test of human senses ; that the same tongue could address them in the same voice as of old ; that the same feet could walk in company with them ; that the same hands could return their timid greeting ; that the same breath could be felt by them in its conveyance of a spiritual blessing to their souls ; that His hands, His feet, His side, still displayed their recent wounds, and that He could even take of their natural food, and eat it in their presence. All this He proved to them, not suddenly, but as they were able to bear it. And more than this, He made them also aware that His Body, though the same, was now free from wants and weaknesses—that it needed not to live on food—that it was able to pass through such obstacles as a sealed stone or a closed door—that it

could appear, in rapid succession, to Mary Magdalene in the garden, to the Disciples on their road to Emmaus, to Simon Peter in some place of lonely retirement, and to all the eleven in their upper room, without such intervals of time as would be required for ordinary locomotion. All this He made them know by His frequent appearances in Judæa ; and by all this He prepared them not only for His glorious appearance on a mountain of Galilee, when He informed five hundred brethren assembled there that all power was given to Him in heaven and earth, but also for His yet more glorious Ascension from the Mount of Olives, to His Father's right hand in heaven.

To the Resurrection of Jesus Christ the whole Gospel history looks forward, and gradually prepares its readers for the reception of the glorious tidings : and in its details far more evidence is granted us in the concluding pages of each Evangelist, than is to be found in proof of any other point recorded by them. To this event the preaching of the Apostles, in the Book of Acts, continually looks back ; and on it also their Epistolary teaching during some forty years continually dwells, as though it formed the very keystone of the Christian faith. What, therefore, was the Resurrection to Christianity, and to the world ?

I. It was, first, that which was required from the beginning for the satisfaction of the wants of human nature. That so perfect a system of organization as the human body should be united with that ethereal essence which we call the soul, infused into it by the Creator's

Breath, that these two should be connected together for a series of years, and yet at length dissevered, never to be re-united, was a great apparent difficulty. Unenlightened reasoners perfectly understood the immortality of the soul ; but they could not for themselves reason out the idea of the body also surviving a change, which seemed to resolve it into the dust from which it was created. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave on the third day shewed the possibility of such a resurrection in the case of others, and exhibited Him as the First-fruits of those that slept.

II. And then, it fulfilled also a variety of types and prophecies contained in those books which now form the Old Testament, and which had been granted at intervals during a long series of ages to God's chosen people. Unless these had been fulfilled, that Testament would have wanted an important link of evidence, for the establishment of its divine origin.

III. Next, it was also the test to which our Saviour had subjected his own claims to the Prophetic or Messianic character. Again and again, when questioned by the Jewish Rulers as to His right to appear as a public Teacher, He had promised the Resurrection of His Body, as a sign of His authority, not always, perhaps, using the clearest language, but adopting certainly such terms as would leave no shadow of doubt as to His meaning, when the great result had been accomplished.

IV. Next, as indicated in our text, it gave significance

to the rite of Christian Baptism, of which indeed the outward sign had long been used by Jews and Gentiles alike, in token of purification, but which now obtained a new meaning, when it was understood that the candidate for Baptism descended into the waters, as Christ into the grave, and rose from thence again, as Christ also rose. As then that glorified Body, with which Christ rose, was apparently possessed of higher powers than that with which He died, so should the Christian or baptised man have higher aims, and to a certain extent, higher powers, than the unbaptised man. This is a view, which St. Paul takes, not merely in our text, but also in that passage which forms the Easter Epistle—"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory." (Col. iii. 1—4.)

v. And yet again, there is another point of importance connected with the Resurrection: it is the fact that Christ has risen, not merely as an individual *Man*, but as *Man*, as the Representative of our race. Rising merely as a *Man*, He would give us the ground of *hoping* that we may rise—rising as *Man*, He has given us the *certainty* that we shall rise. Even as the fall of Adam brought not to him the certainty of death, and to other men only the fear and possibility of death, but in each case the same

certainty of temporal death at least; so was it in regard to Christ, the second Adam, who overcame sin and death, not as an *individual Man*, but as the *Representative Man*, the second Adam; as is so beautifully stated by St. Paul, "*As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive.*" Until therefore, by the Resurrection of Christ, the life and immortality of the body, as well as of the soul, were brought to light, men were encouraged to live here as men who *might* have to live for ever in another and better world, for which this world is but the preparation. But now they have to live as those who *must* so live, and who have therefore to remember that as they sow in this world so shall they reap in another. And this is an awfully important consideration. It shuts out altogether the libertine notion of worldly enjoyment, condemned by S. Paul (1 Cor. xv. 32) "Let us eat and drink—for to-morrow we die." For no one surely would venture to say, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we may wake in another world, in which we are to live for ever!" Who sees not that, however enjoyable eating and drinking and other sensual pleasures may be for a while, they are but an ill-preparation for an endless life!

VI. And yet more than this:—as the mere bringing to light of a future state of existence, consequent on a future judgment, at which would be assigned the condition of every man in that state, might be rather a subject of terror than of joy,—to those who know their own deficiencies, and the utter impossibility of their being acquitted,

on personal and moral grounds, at a bar of unerring justice ; there is another grand point revealed in the Resurrection of Christ. He made it known to His disciples, during His personal ministry,—that when He returned to the Father, He would send the Holy Ghost to guide them into all truth, and to strengthen them against all temptations. And He made at the same time His Resurrection the pledge of His ability to return to His Father, and to send that Holy Spirit. He has now done both. In spite of the precaution of the Pharisees, He rose the third day ; He passed forty days more or less in the company of His disciples, preparing them for the work they should have to do for Him in the world ;—and then, when He had left no doubt upon their minds as to any of the outlines of His blessed Revelation, He ascended up on high, receiving gifts for men, especially the gift of the Holy Spirit, whom He sent down on the day of Pentecost to be thenceforth the Enlightener of His chosen people. From that day forth the Holy Spirit has dwelt among men—applying to their consciences the things that Jesus has Himself revealed, filling their hearts with joy, inspiring them with good desires, and enabling them to bring their good desires to good effect.

VII. All this, brethren, has the Resurrection been to us—and well is it for us if we have felt it to be all this. But we have yet to remember that the Resurrection life, which we enjoy through Christ, though it confers a power, does not lay upon us a compulsion, to be conformed to

Christ. We are still left, as responsible agents, in possession of a free will, and able to use it for good or evil. And hence it is that St. Paul asks the abrupt question with which our text commences, "What shall we say then? shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" Some persons had, even in that early day, begun to presume upon the grace and long-suffering of God. They had apparently argued to themselves, that if Christ had done so much for them, as to shed for them His precious Blood, He surely would not allow Himself to be baffled in His work, but would even save them, as it were, against their will. They seemed to have imagined that it would magnify the work of Christ, that He should have to save them out of a career of vice and profligacy; and, therefore, instead of making an effort to disentangle themselves from the meshes of sin, they had remained contentedly in them, in the belief that they would be dragged forth some day, without any special effort of their own. With the greatest indignation does the Apostle repel the unworthy suggestion, saying, "God forbid! How shall we that are dead to sin live any longer therein?" And surely we must share this indignant feeling. We must deem it almost impossible for ourselves, and for others who enjoy like advantages with ourselves, to live in a course of sin. Yet though *almost*, it is not *quite* impossible; or so nefarious a proposal would never have been made in the hearing of St. Paul, and have drawn from him so hearty an expression of his detestation.

And surely, when we look into our own hearts, though we may find there a seed of holiness,—a desire to please God both in will and deed, we must be conscious of many evil passions and propensities, drawing us back from what we fain would be, and compelling us to re-echo the words of St. Paul in the following chapter, “For that which I do I allow not : for what I would, that I do not ; but what I hate, that do I. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing : for to will is present with me ; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not : but the evil which I would not, that I do. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man : But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from the body of this death ? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God ; but with the flesh the law of sin. (Rom. vii. 15—25.)

If even an Apostle could thus speak as to his own liability to go astray, how much more humble then ought we to be ! How much more watchful against the temptation of continuing in sin, that grace (as it is profanely said, by those who do so,) may abound ! And be it remembered, that it is not certain that in such a case grace will abound. There is indeed no limit to be set

to the grace of Christ : but there is a limit to a man's power of reception of that grace. It is possible for him so to harden his heart against the grace of Christ, that he cannot turn and repent, and so be saved—and what then remains for him, but utter excision from the Body of Christ as a diseased member,—disowned by Him even at present, and more solemnly disowned by Him at the last day ! Let us then, brethren, not be highminded, but fear. Let each one among us that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.

What then is the test, which we may apply to ourselves, whether the risen life of Christ is really ours ? We have in our text a little phrase that suggests it. It is *newness of life*. "As Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." By this then we may try ourselves.

Is our life a dull heavy routine, in which each day is as the day that preceded it, or is there a continual well-spring of newness in it ? The latter should be the case, if we have kept up the reality of being risen with Christ. "The compassions of the Lord," says the prophet, "fail not, they are new every morning, for great is His faithfulness." (Lam. iii. 22, 23). Or as our own Christian poet expresses it—

"New every morning is the love
Our wakening and uprising prove,
Through peace and darkness safely brought,
Restored to life and power and thought.

*New mercies, each returning day,
Hover around us while we pray ;
New perils past, new sins forgiven,
New thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven."*

And as this should be the case every morning, when we wake up from the sleep which to a Christian ought to be the image of death, so especially should it be the case with the morning of the Lord's day, itself the Easter day of every week ; when we not merely wake to duties, new indeed, yet such as those of the former day ; but when we turn with freshened and recruited powers, to duties widely different from those of the preceding six days. From our Christian Sabbath, the cares of secular business are as far as possible banished, and we spend our time as we hope to spend it in heaven, to the glory of God and to the good of our own souls. How happy then ought that day to be to us ! the forerunner of a better rest above, a rest that remaineth for the people of God !

Christian friends, are these things a reality to you, or are they not ? Do you thus walk, even now, in newness of life, or are you even desiring to do so ? Such ought to be the case, if your religion is what it should be to you, your comfort in life and your support in death. Many of those present here can bear witness to the truth of what I say, from their own experience, and find no weariness in devotion, but rather the highest and greatest enjoyment. To them the solemn period of Lent has been a time of religious retirement, during which they have

been able to commune with their own hearts, and be still before God ; and the arrival of the bright Easter season has been a source of unmingled joy. O that the number of such may increase continually, that so our congregation may be, what it seems to be, a gathering of disciples round their risen Lord—a rehearsal as it were of that in which we are to take part more perfectly in heaven !

SERMON IX.

ASCENSION.

(Preached at St. Paul's Cathedral, May 30, 1878.)

PROVERBS XXX. 4.

“Who hath ascended into heaven, or descended? Who hath gathered the wind in His fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what is His Name, and what is His Son's Name, if thou canst tell?”

To the Book of Proverbs, as originally composed by Solomon, are added three supplements :—one commencing with the 25th chapter, and consisting of additional maxims, attributed to the same inspired author, and collected from tradition among the people by the Secretaries of King Hezekiah ;—another, contained in the 30th chapter, described as “the words of Agur”;—a

third in the 31st chapter, ascribed to King Lemuel.

The second of these appendices, from which my text is taken, is perhaps the most valuable to us ; as it repeats in our text certain words of Moses, (from Deut. xxx. 12) which are not only applied by S. Paul (Rom. x. 6) to our Blessed Lord, but are also cited by our Lord Himself, in His conversation with Nicodemus, (John iii. 13) and prophetically anticipate the great event commemorated by the Church to-day. (Ascension Day).

Who, then, is the inspired author, whose words take so wide a range, and are honoured by our Lord's repetition of them ?

To this question we can give no certain answer, nor are we even sure that the word AGUR is actually a proper name. It may be appropriately rendered, the man who has been "gathered in," brought back, that is to say, into the fold or pasture of the Almighty, after wandering from it like a lost sheep. He describes Himself as the son of JAKEH, that is, of the *obedient one*, as though he would contrast his own former errors with his father's consistent piety. This description has led many to think that Solomon was himself the writer of this chapter, when in his days of penitence he looked back with pain on his wandering from God, and thought with shame on his unlikeness to a father who was rightly called the man after God's own heart. This, however, is most improbable, as it would be unnatural, for him, who had received from God the gift of special wisdom, to use of himself the

depreciatory language of the second and third verses :—
“ Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the Holy.”

The author seems, from this statement of his own, to have been untaught in human schools, and yet to have received from God the gift of prophecy ; and in the use of that gift to have been guided into the choice of words which apply to the blessed Messiah, to whose coming he and his countrymen looked forward. Of Him he spake, under the two names, “ ITHIEL ” and “ UCAL,” of which the former signifies, “ *God with me,*” the latter, “ *the mighty one :*” and what names could be more appropriate than these, for Him who was afterwards to be predicted by Isaiah, as “ Immanuel,” “ God with us,” and “ the mighty God.” (Prov. xxx. 1. Isaiah vii. 14, ix. 6).

While speaking thus of the world’s Saviour, in the word of prophecy, the pious Agur makes no claim to personal distinction, on the ground of his knowledge. He calls himself, as we have seen, “ more brutish than any man :” even as David, in like humility, had said of himself, “ So foolish was I and ignorant, even as it were a beast before Thee.” (Psalm lxxiii. 22.)

And what says he in the word of prophecy? “ *Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended ?*” Our Lord Himself, while apparently citing this very passage, answers its question in terms that apply to no one but Himself (John iii. 18), “ No man hath ascended up to

heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven."

"*Who hath gathered up the wind in His fists?*" He, we answer, who "in the beginning was with God, and was God: (John i. 1) "He, who brought the wind out of His treasure" (Psalm cxxxv. 7): He, whom during His ministry the wind and the sea obeyed. (Matt. viii. 27.)

"*Who hath bound the waters with a garment?*" He, we answer, who, on the third day of creation, said, "Let the waters be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear:" He, whom Job described as binding up the waters in thick clouds, that are not rent beneath them (Job xxvi. 8): He, who shut up the sea with bars, and said, "Hitherto shalt thou come and no further, and here shalt thy proud waves be stayed." (Job xxxviii. 8—11).

"*Who hath established the ends of the earth?*" He, we answer, "who laid its foundation, and stretched the line upon it, and laid its corner stone, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy" (Job xxxviii. 5—7): He, who on the sixth day of creation, gave over that earth, when He had pronounced it very good, to the occupation of His new-made creature, man.

"*What is His Name, and what His Son's Name, if thou canst tell?*" Vainly indeed men sought an answer to this question, till our Lord appeared in human form on earth. They knew Him, in Patriarchal days, as the "LORD ALMIGHTY." (Gen. xvii. 1) They knew Him after

the revelation on Mount Sinai, as "JEHOVAH, the Lord of Hosts." (Exodus vi. 3). They knew Him, in the dimly understood distinction of Persons, as "the ANGEL of the Covenant, (Exod. xxiii. 20, 21), the CAPTAIN of the Lord of Hosts." (Joshua v. 14.) They knew Him, as One whose Name was SECRET. (Judges xiii. 18.) They knew Him, on the page of prophecy as "SHILOH," (Genesis xlix. 10), "IMMANUEL," the "WONDERFUL, the COUNSELLOR, the MIGHTY GOD, the PRINCE OF PEACE" (Isaiah vii. 14, ix. 6.) They knew Him, as Agur speaks of Him, as "ITHIEL and UCAL," the Present God, and the Mighty. But they knew Him not as very Man, the root and offspring of David, the Babe of Bethlehem, the Exile in Egypt, the Child of Nazareth, the Prophet of Galilee, the Crucified of Calvary. Still less could they sum up His history as it is given by St. Paul to Timothy: "God manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." (1 Tim. iii. 16.)

Yes :—until the New Dispensation was complete, there was no complete clue to that mystery of Godliness, of which the climax is here given by S. Paul. But now, though much is still mysterious, we are permitted to understand that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit proceeding from them both, have existed as One God throughout all eternity. Now, we are permitted to know that the plans of creation and redemption were deeply laid even before the world was : and that in them each of

the Three Persons had his definite work, though in perfect unity of Council. Now, we are allowed to understand that the words of our text contain a mysterious revelation of the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity, in the announcement of One who descended to be incarnate here on earth, but who ascended with His own Humanity into heaven, and who held, as it were, in His hand the rushing mighty WIND, which was to descend on the day Pentecost, (Acts ii. 2-4) bearing those gifts for man, which have been shed forth ever since abundantly on His Church. (Psalm lxviii. 18, Eph. iv. 8.)

Our Saviour has, in a manner, authorised this interpretation, by saying, concerning Himself, to Nicodemus :—“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen ; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, the Son of Man which is in heaven. For God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world : but that the world through Him might be saved.” (John iii. 11—17). From this passage, it would appear that the Lord Jesus, the Son of Man, came down from heaven, and yet was in heaven even while here ;—the Lord of heaven dwelling on earth, angels ascending and descending

upon the Son of Man, (John i. 52) as He Himself expressed it : and that when His work was finished, He ascended up to heaven, to claim His reward on behalf of those for whose sake He had descended. What wonder then, that the Church, like the little band of the Apostles, who watched, from the Mount of Olives, His ascending course, till He was received into that bright cloud of glory, composed of an infinite throng of angels, that accompanied Him to His Father's Throne, should, as it were, on this day, stand gazing up into Heaven ?

Yet is there nothing unpractical in this gazing attitude of the Church. Her true and faithful children have communion here with Him, whose special presence is now in heaven. They believe that He is also in the midst of them, wherever two or three are gathered together in His Name. They, therefore, set their affections above, where He sitteth, and look for His return to claim His own. Their outer life is here among their brethren, but their inner life is hid with Christ in God (Col. iii. 3). They, therefore, so live as men whose citizenship is in heaven, (Phil. iii. 20), though their dwelling is here on earth :— Like those Roman citizens who dwelt indeed in various countries throughout the subject world, yet looking to one great central point, said each for himself, as the proudest title a man could claim, “I am a citizen of no mean city.” (Acts xxi. 39.)

How impossible then ought it to be for one who loves His Saviour, and who duly meditates on His being now

enthroned above, to entangle Himself with the affairs of this world, its cares, its riches, or its pleasures ! He will do his duty in this world, as a member of an earthly family ; as a king, a noble, a soldier, a tradesman, a labourer, or in whatever other field his lot be cast ; but he will not be only what he seems to be in the eye of the world. He will be something more, a member of Christ, the child of God the Father, and an inheritor of that Kingdom of Heaven, of which His Lord, as on this day, took possession in his name.

And, indeed, it is of great importance that each of us should be assured of the great event of this day. Complex beings as we are, made up of body and soul, it would be a very imperfect prospect for our future beyond the grave, if we thought of our Saviour as now resident in Heaven, only in *His Divine nature*, or even with the spiritual part of our human nature absorbed in His Divinity. This would be no sufficient assurance to us *as men*, that we may also have a place there. Our comfort is that He has ascended thither, bearing with Him the whole and perfect nature of Man, a Soul and a Body ;—and that, with that whole and perfect nature, He has entered heaven as our Representative. Had He concluded His ministry by simply dying on the Cross as Man, we might indeed have believed that as Man He had wrought an atonement for us. Had He then simply appeared from time to time after the Resurrection, we might have regarded such appearances, as even His disciples did at first (Luke xxiv. 37),

as phantoms, shadowy appearances, assumed by Him, as by His Angels of old, when they brought messages to man. But it was not thus; not only was His form visible, and His voice audible, but His Body also could be touched, and the very wounds, which men had inflicted on that Holy Body examined: (John xx. 27) He ate and drank in the presence of those who had seen Him perform the same function before He suffered: He was here and there, amid this company and that, with scarcely a perceptible interval of time,—making it clear that though His Body was the same it had been, it was in some sense glorified, so as to triumph over space and time, and to be ready for a removal to a higher sphere. During forty days this continued, till evidence of His identity had been accumulated in abundance. The time came at length, when He was to part with those who had been so long His faithful companions; and then there was no abruptness, no sudden separation between Him and them, as when a chariot of fire came between Elijah and his companion, and carried off the Prophet, as it were, half unwillingly up to heaven. (2 Kings ii. 11.) No! the Lord Jesus had walked forth from Jerusalem in the company of those His friends whom He had chosen to be His witnesses. He had blessed them and bid them an affectionate farewell;—and then He gradually rose from the midst of them, calmly, quietly, peacefully, till the closing heavens received Him from their view. By this they knew that it was possible for a human Body as well as for a human Soul to

enter the holiest place above. Nor was this all : He had bidden them tarry in Jerusalem till He should give them proof of His power resumed on high by sending down from heaven the promised Comforter. They did so, and not in vain. The Holy Spirit of God descended upon them to confirm *them*, and the great multitude in all ages of whom they were the representatives, in their belief, that they were not orphans : that the Father loved them still : that the Son was preparing their place above, and the Holy Spirit preparing them to occupy their places in due time. Henceforth they knew and felt the preciousness of the body : the reality of its vocation to be a temple of the Holy Ghost, the danger of suffering it to be soiled by this sinful world, and the duty of receiving from time to time the Blessed Sacrament, in which they believed that their bodies were to be made clean by Christ's Body, as well as their souls washed by His precious Blood, that so they might evermore dwell in Him, and He in them.

Is this then, brethren, your feeling in regard to the mystery of this holy day? Is it a pledge to you of your share in the glories above, and of the changeless love of Him who has brought those glories within your reach? I trust it is :—and I believe that it is with that view that the Church has provided a special Eucharistic Preface for this day, laying thus on faithful Christians the duty of partaking on this day, as you, I hope, have done, or will do presently, of the Holy Communion. What prayer could be more appropriate than that of the proper

Eucharistic Preface, "That where He is, thither we might ascend, and reign with Him in glory!" O that this blessedness may in due time be ours! and that in the meantime we may, as the Collect suggests, in heart and mind thither ascend, and in affection continually dwell with *Him*, who hath "established the ends of the earth;" who has "revealed to us His own Name, and His Son's Name;" and who has accepted His Son's prayer, that "we may be *one in Him* on earth, and hereafter may be *with Him where He is*, and so we may behold the glory that the Father has given *Him*, whom He loved before the foundation of the world." (John xvii. 24.)

SERMON X.

WHITSUN - DAY .

(After a Confirmation.)

JOHN XVI. 12-15.

"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all truth : for He shall not speak of Himself, but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak : and He will show you things to come. He shall glorify Me ; for He shall receive of Mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are Mine : therefore said I, that He shall take of Mine, and shall shew it unto you."

WE have been lately witnesses to a scene very memorable in the lives of those who were principally interested in it. A great church was filled with young Christians, brought up in the knowledge and profession of the Christian religion, and waiting for the fulfilment of a promise made to them in their Baptism. During some

weeks of serious preparation on their part, and on that of those to whose care they were entrusted, that promise had been explained to them. They had been taught that the Holy Ghost had indeed been given to them in Baptism ; but that they were now to look for a fuller outpouring of His influence, to strengthen and confirm them for the duties of life that were before them. A solemn prayer was uttered in their behalf, that He, who had regenerated them by water and the Holy Ghost, would now strengthen them with the Holy Ghost the Comforter. And soon a dove-like hand hovered over the brow of each, while a prayer went up for them to the throne of grace, that they might daily increase in the Holy Spirit more and more, till they should come to God's everlasting kingdom.

And this was no dream : we have reason to believe that God's promise was fulfilled, and that as many young Christians as presented themselves in faith before the chief pastor of Christ's Church among us on that occasion, came away from the ceremony not merely seriously impressed, but also spiritually strengthened.

To illustrate that which then occurred amongst us, carry back your thoughts to the beginning of our era : think of One, over whose birth the Holy Ghost Himself presided, and who was therefore, in the highest sense of the word, sanctified from His mother's womb. Think of Him, after leading a holy childhood, and a blameless manhood, at the end of His thirty years' probation, coming forward in deep humility to fulfil all righteousness, and to

claim a Father's promised gift. The Prophet Isaiah had long since declared of Him, that the Spirit of the Lord should rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the Fear of the Lord, to make Him of quick understanding in the Fear of the Lord. Isaiah xi. 2, 3 For the fulfilment of this promise, He now stood waiting on the banks of Jordan, undistinguished among the crowd who sought at the hands of S. John the washing of a Baptism which He needed not, having no sins to repent of. Behold now the Holy Ghost descending as a Dove upon that pure Representative of our humanity, and abiding on Him, to strengthen Him for a Ministry which was to commence in a wilderness and end upon a Cross !

For further illustration, carry then your thoughts three years forward to the time when that laborious ministry is drawing to a close, and fix your eyes upon a little band of brethren, who have accompanied their Master from that day of His Baptism, through trials and hardships, and have been made to feel their own weakness unless they be aided by a spiritual Power. As His days of converse with them grow fewer, He prepares them by such language as that of our text for the descent of the Holy Spirit.

That *word*, the HOLY SPIRIT, was not new to them : it was of constant and familiar occurrence in the writings of Moses, of the Prophets, and of the Psalmists. But there was something new in the manner in which the Lord

Jesus spoke of Him, as the Present Comforter, whom He Himself would send to them from the Father. How that Comforter was to come they knew not ; but they knew at least that He should come in the hour of their greatest need. They were not to look to Him for the revelation of new things, but for fresh assurance of the things which they had heard and known already, which their Lord had Himself communicated to them in a shadowy form, without their being able to appreciate them. How anxious must have been their expectations, till these, and many words like these, were at length fulfilled. Some weeks, eventful weeks, passed away, between the first promise of the Comforter and its fulfilment. During that trying time the little band was found sadly wanting : they were scattered from the Cross, and with difficulty recalled by the tidings of the opened grave, and of the appearance of their risen Lord. On one occasion, during this time of expectation, He had called them round Him, and had actually said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost," and breathed upon them in token of His gift, even as in the day of creation He had breathed on the man whom He had made, and He became a living soul. But whatever was the grace conveyed by that Holy Breath, the entire communication of the Holy Spirit promised in our text was not yet made. They had still the charge to obey, "Tarry ye in Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high : wait then in humble faith, for the promise of the Father which ye have heard of Me : for John truly

baptised with water, but ye shall be baptised with the Holy Ghost, not many days hence."

For this promise then they still waited, and not in vain. They saw their Lord depart into heaven, and were assured by angels that He should even so return, but when, they ventured not to guess. Meantime, they daily visited the temple, to praise their God in Christ, and wait for the Promise, in whatever way it might please their Father to fulfil it. And they were not without their reward. The day of Pentecost arrived, the next great Feast after that Passover, on which their Lord had suffered ;—the day which commemorated the giving of the Law to those who had been in the Passover emancipated from the bondage of Egypt : Jerusalem was as full as during the Passover of devout Jews, who had come to keep the Feast from every country under heaven, into which the Lord had scattered them. And among that crowd was that little anxious band, gathered in one of the chambers that surrounded the Temple courts, and obediently expecting the mysterious promise. "The wind bloweth where it listeth," their Saviour had said long since, "and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth : so is every one that is born of the spirit." Thus then it happened on the day of Pentecost. Without a moment's warning, there was heard through the Temple courts the sound of a rushing mighty WIND, as on Sinai of old, when the Lord came down to proclaim His Law. A fire was

seen, not, however, as on Sinai, forbidding approach and blazing up to heaven, but a gentle lambent flame, sitting harmlessly on the brow of those thus baptised with the Holy Ghost and with fire. A voice was also heard, not like that terrible voice from Sinai, which compelled the people, and even Moses, their chosen Law-giver, to tremble and quake, but a voice uttered from many human lips in sweet accord, declaring to all people, nations, and languages, the wonderful works of God.

We know not how this wonder was brought about : how it came to pass, that some one at least of those chosen witnesses for Christ should be intelligible to each of the assembled crowd. Sufficient to say that it was for the moment the reversal of the curse of Babel : the *union* of languages for the promotion of God's honour, instead of the *confusion* of them by His miraculous interference ; the first step towards gathering a people prepared for the Lord. As our Lord waited on the banks of Jordan, and in due time was sealed by the Holy Spirit, so waited these His faithful servants, and learned from that Holy Spirit the things which they could not have borne, when He was first promised to them. They were gently guided by Him into a knowledge of all truth, they were strengthened and emboldened by Him to speak it freely, even in the presence of those unjust rulers, before whose very menial servants they had lately trembled ; and thus became possessed of a "mouth and wisdom which no man could gainsay or resist." (Luke xxi. 15.)

And as it was with those disciples, so was it also with the youthful followers of Christ whom we have lately seen gathered together waiting for the gift of the Holy Spirit. They had received a portion of that Spirit already in Baptism, that blessed Sacrament, in which the Holy Ghost sanctifieth the elect people of God, among whom it is their privilege to be reckoned. But they, like the Disciples, waited for a more perfect gift, and waited not in vain. The gift bestowed on them was as suitable to their minds, and as satisfying to their desires, as was the gift communicated to those, who on the day of Pentecost felt the rushing of the wind, and beheld on each other's brows the cloven tongues of fire. For to each member of Christ is the Holy Spirit given to profit withal. Certain marvellous powers were apparently required in early days, to bear witness to the truth of the preaching of Christ, and to enable men so to carry on that holy work through the world, that before that generation should pass, the message might be echoed in all lands. But to no such work as this are our Christian children called. They have been baptized into a church which has safely passed through the trial of persecution, and they have, as we hope, rather to adorn it than to die for it. They have mostly to lead, for some time longer, a quiet Christian life, at the side of their parents, or of those Christian friends, to whom their parents have entrusted them :—and in such tranquil homes they may find room for the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit. And they will then have to go forth into

various walks of active life, where harder trials will await them, not such indeed as beset the heroes of the first Pentecost, but such at least as will need the exercise of spiritual experience and spiritual strength. For the ripening of that experience, and the acquisition of that strength, the gifts have been bestowed upon them which are enumerated in the Bishop's prayer, and which Isaiah (xi. 1—3.) said should rest upon our blessed Lord, as He grew up out of the stem of Jesse: "the Spirit of Wisdom and Understanding, the Spirit of Counsel and Ghostly Strength, the Spirit of Knowledge and true Godliness, and the Spirit of Holy Fear." For such gifts as these our Lord found daily exercise, in His constant and laborious pilgrimages through the villages of Galilee, Samaria and Judæa. For such His disciples found opportunity, on going forth at His command to preach the Gospel to every creature; and no doubt they were happier in their use of these ordinary gifts, than in the display of those miraculous powers of which so much more is read on the surface of their history. The miraculous gifts, when no more needed, have been gradually withdrawn, and no trace of them now remains in the Church; but not so the inward spiritual gifts, of which every Christian has need, each day he lives.

Young Christians, of whom so many are gathered around me here, take to yourselves the Promise of the Father, the Promise of the Son, the Promise of the Holy Ghost. The Father Himself has promised to send the Holy Spirit, to

guide you into all truth ; and the Son has also promised to send Him from the Father ; for He proceedeth from the Father and the Son, and He has Himself promised to descend in His fulness on those who have opened their hearts as temples for His in-dwelling. Think not of that Holy Spirit as merely an influence from on high, but as a Person of the ever blessed Trinity, coming from the heavens, even as Christ came, but in a different manner, and for a different purpose :—coming to complete the work of Christ in your hearts : coming to bring home to your understanding truths that are Christ's, but which without His aid would be too high for you to grasp : pleading with you, and in you, with groanings that cannot be uttered ;—suggesting to you good desires, enabling you to bring them to good effect, and giving you a right judgment in all things that concern your peace ! How happy are ye, if ye have lifted your hearts up to the Lord, and have received in return the presence of His blessed Spirit in them, the earnest of your bright inheritance above. Go on, then, I beseech you, in the use of all the means of grace that are offered you, especially the privilege of worshipping in God's house, and in particular of gathering round the Holy Table, which is now freely open to you. Thus did our Lord's disciples gather round it of old time, and He failed not to be known to them in the Breaking of Bread. Study also with daily attention His Holy Book, in which there are many mysteries, which the Holy Spirit will gradually reveal to you, not by some

marvellous inspiration, but in answer to your prayerful study of the written Word. Avail yourselves of whatever means are open to you for the acquirement of such knowledge, and however elementary be the lesson, if it be faithfully listened to, it may make you wiser daily unto salvation.

And ye, elder friends, to whom these things are familiar as an oft-told tale, condescend to dwell upon them with a little earnest thought at present, especially if it be your happiness and privilege to have seen just now some young members of your families confirmed. Think not of the day of Pentecost as a mythical rather than an historical event ; think not of the descent of the Spirit on that day as a grant of privileges to the ancient rather than to the existing Church : realize the words of S. Peter on that day, that “ the blessing is upon you and upon your children, and upon them that are far off, even as many as the Lord your God shall call.” (Acts ii. 39.)

Think not upon the Confirmation as an impressive ceremony :—which indeed it certainly is, even to the most careless—but a solemn occasion, of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon those whom you love, and for whose spiritual interest you are deeply concerned. Let the thought of that service bring back to you the memory of earlier and happier days, when the world had not yet hardened you against religious impressions : when your heart was tender like that of your children now, and open readily to the influence of the Holy Spirit. O that you

may be induced henceforth to accompany your children regularly to the Holy Table, and that while you mingle your prayers with theirs, you may find the dew of grace descend freshly upon yourselves also. O that you may find that Spirit taking of the things of Christ, and shewing them unto you, and enabling you to glorify the Lord Jesus in your body, soul, and spirit.

SERMON XI.

HOLY TRINITY.

JOHN XIV. 23.

“If a man love Me, he will keep My words ; and my Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him.”

THE first half of our Christian year is at an end. We have been conducted through a series of commemorations of the events of our Lord's ministry, and of the corresponding mysteries of the Christian faith, until at length we have reached the day, on which the Church calls us to meditate on the great doctrine of the existence of Three Persons in One God. The words which convey the doctrine are of course mysterious : and for that reason many, and those in some instances really pious Christians, turn away from the consideration of them. They say, and

that without intentional irreverence, "I cannot understand such dark language, and I must therefore be allowed to fix my attention on the many more practical statements, which I find clearly revealed in Holy Scripture."

Now, if such persons were speaking only of the language of some earthly friend, whom they greatly respected, but whom they knew to be compassed with not less than the ordinary amount of human frailty, such expressions might perhaps be allowed. For the sake of the many other excellent points which they acknowledged in their friend's character, they might still love him, and regard other words of his with respect, even while they refused to listen to him on a particular subject. But I think that, even in the case supposed, they would have given their best attention to their friend's hard saying, before they turned away from it as thoroughly unpractical.

They, however, among us who are contented to lay aside the mysterious subject of the Blessed Trinity, have done so for the most part without such careful consideration. They have paid far less attention to it than they would have done to the speculations of their neighbour.

And yet the Doctrine of the Trinity comes to them on the authority of the Church to which they belong: and that Church has faithfully transmitted to them the belief of the Universal Church for nearly nineteen centuries. Nor has she, in this instance, claimed to be heard on her own authority, but has simply acted as a witness and keeper of Holy Writ. She readily allows that the

technical word, "Trinity," is nowhere to be found on the inspired pages ; but she maintains that it reverently sums up in a single phrase the statements of Scripture concerning God.

The Doctrine is, as we believe, revealed by God the Father, put into words by God the Son, and communicated to mankind, through the inspired Scriptures, by God the Holy Ghost. Shadowed forth on the first page of Genesis, the first Book of the Old Testament, it supplies the key to the mysteries of the New Testament, even to the last page of its last Book, the Revelation of S. John. How can therefore any of us dare to lay aside as unimportant that which God Himself has counted important enough to be thus written for our learning ! Our Lord Jesus Christ has made it a test of our love to Him, that we should "keep His words," among which is the assertion of the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity ; and He has promised that if any man truly love Him, and keep His words, He will love him, and His Father will regard Him also with the same love ; and They both will fix Their home in his heart. (John xiv. 23.)

If this be so, surely we are bound to give our attention to such a saying as that of our text : containing, as it does, an incidental statement of the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity.

Had God never been pleased to reveal Himself to man, His existence would have been just as much a fact, as it is when revealed. And with the reasoning faculties that

He has given to man, He might fairly have demanded of him that he should believe that existence, and be grateful to the Author of his being. An atheist, if there ever has really been one, is therefore a rebel against nature, as much as against a revealed God. But beyond such *belief* and such *gratitude*, and their natural result, obedience to the conscience and moral feelings with which man has been created, the Creator would have no further claims on man.

But man has not been left in the world in such a state of ignorance of his Creator as we have just now suggested. From the very first, he has received knowledge with which his reason could never have supplied him. Placed in a garden of delight, he was allowed personal converse with God; nor could that converse have been interrupted except by His own wilful disobedience. That it *was* interrupted we sadly know; and yet the sinful race was not cast off entirely, but allowed still access to God in prayer and in sacrifice. What amount of knowledge of God was granted to our first parents, and the early patriarchs, we know not: but it is hardly likely to be less than that which was afterwards contained in the first written revelation of God to man. On the first page of the law of Moses, we find the *One* God declaring Himself to man in a word of *plural* form. There also we find, before any act of creation has been described, an uncreated Spirit of God moving, or rather brooding, upon the face of the waters. Then we read of a council of the God-

head held at the creation of man, and uttering the decree : " Let *Us* make man in *Our* image." Then we meet with a similar council held on the fall of man : "The man is become as *one of Us*." (Gen. i. 1, 2, 26, iii. 22.) These were indeed mysterious sayings, and on them thoughtful men pondered from age to age, and enjoyed the further light that was thrown upon them by the Prophets whom God raised up among them. But at length, in the fulness of the times, One was born, of whom a Prophet had been inspired to declare that He should be " God with us—the everlasting God." (Isaiah vii. 14, ix. 6). Of His place in the Divine economy, an Evangelist was also empowered to say, in supplement as it were to the first words of Genesis : " In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him ; and without Him was not any thing made that was made." (John i. 1-3.)

On Him, at the commencement of His Ministry, the Holy Spirit descended like a Dove, while the Divine Father bore witness to Him in a voice from Heaven, " This is My Beloved Son." (Matt. iii. 16, 17.) And in the latter part of the ministry, thus auspiciously begun, He repeatedly referred to that Divine Spirit who had taken part in the work of creation, in such terms as these : " I will pray the *Father*, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever ; *even the Spirit of truth* ; whom the world cannot receive, because

it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him : but ye know Him ; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless : *I will come to you.*" (John xiv. 16-18). The presence of that Divine Spirit would be therefore in some sense *His own* presence also ; and in the course of the same conversation, the Divine Speaker, who had thus attributed the sending of the Spirit to His Father, went on to say, as in our text, of every man who should love Him and keep His sayings : " If a man love Me, he will keep my words : and my *Father* will love him, and *We* will come unto Him, and make *our* abode with him. He that loveth *Me* not keepeth not *My* sayings : and the word which ye hear is not Mine, but the *Father's* which sent Me." Thus then was it further declared, that the presence of the Holy Spirit in a man would be also the presence of the Father and the Son. He, the Divine Son, who asserted this, was fully aware of the hardness of His sayings, and of the impossibility of His simple followers unravelling them without assistance : and He therefore added : " These things have I spoken unto you, being *yet* present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My Name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." And with this His Disciples were at the moment satisfied. The day, however, came at length when, just before He ascended, He added the top stone to the fabric of Revelation, by bidding them baptize all nations

in the Name of the *Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.*" What could they infer from this, after what had been already communicated to them, but that the Father was God, the Son God, and the Holy Ghost God—Three Persons, though certainly but One God—and that the Plurality of Persons, which they had been gradually trained to acknowledge, was limited to *Three*.

Such would be their natural conclusions, and though they found the doctrine contained in them dark and difficult, they were not like those unfaithful followers, who at an earlier period said, " This is a hard saying, who can hear it ?" and from thenceforth turned back and followed Jesus no more. So far from this, they waited patiently the fulfilment of that promise of the arrival of the Divine Comforter, who should teach them all that was yet wanting to their knowledge, and bring into harmony in their willing minds all that the Lord had taught them. And not in vain did they wait. The day of Pentecost arrived : the Holy Ghost descended, and made His abode in them.

From that time forward, no doubts disturbed their mind. The Book of Acts depicts their work. They taught men everywhere to acknowledge the Father, through the Son, and by the Holy Ghost—and three centuries passed before the wilfulness and incredulity of men made it necessary for the Fathers of the Church to meet in solemn council at Nicæa, and declare what the Apostles had taught, and the world had believed, in regard to the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity.

The decision of such a Council ought to have been enough to banish all strange Doctrines in regard to the acknowledgment of the Divinity of each of the *Three Persons*, consistently with the *Unity* of the *Godhead*. And accordingly more than a century passed away, and the members of that Council were gathered to their rest, before a formula was given to the world which grouped into one view, and stated with logical precision, all that was contained in Holy Scriptures on this momentous subject. We call this formula the Creed of S. Athanasius, because it embodies the teaching of one who was most prominent as a faithful witness for truth at the Nicene Council. That Creed, whoever was its author, for neither S. Athanasius himself, nor the Council in which he sat, composed it, has been handed down to us, approved by the Church from age to age, and especially recommended to us by our own reformers. About once in every month it is repeated in our Churches, but as three only of the days for which it is appointed are necessarily Sundays, it is not so familiar to our ears as it ought to be; and when it is read, many listen to it with astonishment rather than with edification. This ought not to be: men ought to be more accustomed than they are to the full statement of the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity. It is perhaps a hymn rather than a creed, and gratefully expresses, as indeed does also the *Te Deum*, the belief of the Church. There is no bigotry or intolerance in its words. It denounces none but those who wilfully deny the truth:—

and is as far as possible from asserting the everlasting ruin of those who have had no opportunity of learning God's record concerning himself. There is not a point asserted in it which may not be proved from Holy Scripture; not one which could be dispensed with, without giving incompleteness to the statement of Christian doctrine. For unless such truths had been important, they surely would not have been revealed: and having been revealed, they ought to be asserted and maintained.

But again, they must be lovingly, and not harshly, maintained—"If a man love Me," said our Saviour in the text, "he will keep My *words*:" not merely My *Commandments*, as He had already said, but My *words*, all that I have condescended to reveal. This is true in the highest degree concerning the actual *words* which proceeded from the blessed Saviour's mouth: but it is true also concerning all the words that the Holy Spirit, who proceedeth from Him and from His Father, has revealed in Holy Scripture. What the words of Scripture were to the author of the 119th Psalm, they ought to be, in a far higher degree, to us: since to us the Lord Jesus has been personally made known in the Gospel, and by the Holy Ghost in our religious experience from day to day. Well may we in grateful wonder say, with Judas (not Iscariot) "Lord how is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself to us?" (John xiv, 22) What are we, that Thou shouldst have so loved us? O what can we do to shew forth our love in return for Thine infinite love? We can but love

Thee in return : we can but declare Thy love to others, not by our lips only, but in our lives ; proving to the world from day to day that our religion is not one of intolerance, that would force men into agreement with us, but one of love. That the love of the Father has led us to regard all men as our brothers : that the love of the Son has made us eager to bring all men to Him : that the love of the Holy Spirit has made us quick in reading His holy will developed in us and in His Church in general. O that such may be the case, that Creeds may be felt to be symbols of Christian union, not as they have been too often made, occasions of religious strife, which is the worst source of human warfare ! O that the Holy Spirit, who is the Guide of the Church in general, may be the Guide of you in particular, watching over you, while you are still on trial, and guiding you into the haven where you would be !

SERMON XII.

S. BARNABAS.

(Preached on the Dedication Festival of S. Barnabas' Church.)

ACTS IV. 36, 37.

“Josep, who by the Apostles was surnamed BARNABAS (which is, being interpreted, *the Son of Consolation*), a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the Apostles' feet.”

NEXT to the honour of receiving a name from our Blessed Lord, the great Searcher of hearts, was that of receiving one from His Apostles, who among their various gifts had that of the “discerning of spirits.” To one of the most eminent among His first followers the great Master said, “Thou art Simon, the Son of Jonas, thou shalt be called Cephas, or Peter, which is by interpretation a stone.” (John i. 42). And thus also the first mention of him who was later called by the Holy Spirit to the

Apostleship, is "Joses, by the Apostles was surnamed Barnabas, or the Son of Consolation."

There has been discussion as to the meaning of the title which the Apostles conferred upon their young assistant. From its first occurrence in immediate connection with the noble action recorded in our text, it has been argued that his liberality, in selling his land to meet the Church's need, was so consoling and encouraging to the Apostles under their financial difficulties in regard to the maintenance of the poor, that he was therefore honoured with the title, "Son of *consolation*." This suggestion however is based rather upon the word consolation, used by our translators for a word that may well bear another meaning. That meaning is *exhortation*; and when we read of him, that on his mission to Antioch, (Acts xi. 23) he *exhorted* the new converts that with purpose of heart they should cleave unto the Lord, it appears not improbable that he derived his name from his eloquence in exhortation.

It is, however, a matter of little importance whence his name was derived. It is enough for us that it was conferred by those who knew his value, and that his example has been valued by the Church in all ages.

When the Jewish authorities had set themselves in decided opposition to Christianity, it seemed more than probable that by their exclusive dealing they would be able to reduce the Church in Jerusalem to the greatest misery. Just at that moment, S. Barnabas, a Levite, who

could not legally alienate the lands belonging to him as a member of that sacred tribe within the promised land, sold an estate belonging to him in the Island of Cyprus, and brought the price to the Apostles, in order to supply the pressing needs of the Christian poor. And no doubt such an example was extensively followed. Indeed the very next chapter gives an instance of its being hypocritically imitated by persons who wished to derive honour from an apparent self-denial, and yet to save themselves from a possible loss. Of such hypocrites as Ananias, we may hope that among the early Christians there were but few ; of such real benefactors as S. Barnabas we are sure there were many ; or the Church could not have passed so safely as it did through its early trials in Jerusalem. And indeed it has ever been one of the great advantages of the Church in all ages that it has found such men as S. Barnabas in every land. The Church of England, for instance, was never endowed by the State, as is commonly supposed. The Parish Church in every village was first built at the expense of the proprietor of the land, and endowed out of his personal estates, given by him as willingly for the purpose as were the lands of S. Barnabas in Cyprus. All that the State has done is to secure to the Church continued possession of that which charitable individuals at an early period have given.

According to the ordinary meaning among us of the word *charity*, S. Barnabas was eminently a charitable man : for we have seen how he divested himself of his

property for the good of others, in humble imitation of the Lord Jesus Christ, who, in a much higher sense, for our sakes became poor that many might be made rich. But the next incident recorded of him is an instance of that higher form of charity, which is superior to prejudice, and thinketh no evil of others. (1 Cor. xiii. 4-7.) Never was any conversion likely to be more doubted than that of Saul of Tarsus. Having lately been the chosen instrument of the Priests for persecuting Christians in Jerusalem, he had gone down to Damascus with the deliberate purpose of carrying out the same oppressive measures there. Within a few months he re-appeared in Jerusalem, and sought admission into the company of those he had so lately persecuted. He was naturally regarded with suspicion, not unmingled with fear : but S. Barnabas rose superior to that spirit of distrust, informed himself of the facts of Saul's miraculous conversion, and of the manner in which he proved his earnestness, by his preaching at Damascus, and by his endurance of persecution there. He then introduced to the Apostles the man whom they had at first distrusted, and encouraged him to continue at Jerusalem the work that he had begun at Damascus. To him, therefore, under God, we owe the early recognition of Saul as a chosen vessel for the Lord's work.

But we have a still higher instance of charity in this nobler sense, in the conduct of S. Barnabas at Antioch. The Apostles at Jerusalem were not yet convinced that Gentiles were admissible to the Church of Christ without

first passing through the stage of Judaism. Many of those who were scattered over foreign lands, by the persecution which followed on S. Stephen's martyrdom, had ventured to preach the Gospel to Greeks as well as Jews. The vision at Joppa, which taught S. Peter to call nothing common or unclean, had not yet been granted at the time of this dispersion, or had not yet produced its full effect, when the tidings reached Jerusalem of this new development of Gospel preaching. The Apostles, therefore, even though their Lord's Commission had bid them preach the Gospel to every creature, seem to have looked with some suspicion on the growth of a purely Gentile Church. Under these circumstances, they empowered S. Barnabas, as one possessed of their full confidence, to visit Antioch, and enquire how matters really stood. They possibly expected that he would find something which it would be his duty to repress by the weight of their authority. So far, however, from this being the case, he saw nothing but a cause for rejoicing in what had taken place. Witnessing the grace of God, as manifested in the Christian life and spirit of these Gentile Christians, he rejoiced with them, and not merely exhorted them to stand fast, but went on to Tarsus to find Saul, (whom he had so lately introduced to the Apostles, but who had since returned home to his native city,) believing that he had now found the right work for such a man. Nor was he mistaken. Saul had already seen a vision in the Temple, in which his Lord had said to him, "Depart, for I

will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles" (Acts xxii. 21). How he was to carry out the commission, he knew not, but simply waited in not unfruitful retirement, till God's Providence should indicate the way. The appearance of S. Barnabas at Tarsus, with the invitation to join him in work among the Gentiles at Antioch, formed the answer to his prayer, and the fulfilment of his expectations; and he gladly resumed the work of evangelization under such a leader. For two years after this, these two holy men pursued their labours in concert, until they were together called by the Holy Ghost to the Apostleship, and went forward with renewed powers to the great enterprize of itinerant Missionary work. (Acts xiii. 2.)

I have thought it right to say thus much of the career of the Apostle, from whom our Parish Church derives its name, on this his own festival, because I would press upon you the example of his charity, not merely in the sense of liberal giving, as indicated in our text, but of that true liberality of soul which he displayed in the two other passages of his history, to which I have referred. Not all the energy of a Peter, not all the faith of a Paul, would make up a true Christian character without the charity of a Barnabas. For so indeed said S. Paul himself: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and

have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." (1 Cor. xii. 1-3.)

There is room in the Christian character for every kind of excellence, but none of the eminent qualities commonly called virtues must be allowed to stand alone. They must be harmonised by Christian love, such as we have traced in S. Barnabas, such as we also trace in S. John, and such as we admire, in the highest degree, in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Many ancient philosophers were distinguished for some one form of virtue, and men honoured them for it: but they had to make excuse for sad deficiencies which existed together with it. It must not be thus with a Christian, as S. Paul clearly indicates in the passage that I have just cited. And yet we cannot but be well aware that there is such an acknowledged deficiency in many Christians. Their liberality of money is counterbalanced by the roughness with which they confer their favours: their devoutness in personal religion, by their selfishness towards their neighbours: their orthodoxy, by their intolerance, and so on. This ought not so to be. Men ought to be watchful over themselves, lest their supposed virtues should degenerate into actual faults. And here again they may learn a lesson from S. Barnabas, who is said by the author of the Acts of the Apostles, to have been a good man, *full of the Holy Ghost*, as well as of

faith." (Acts xi. 24.) It was this presence of the Holy Ghost, as the ruling Principle of the heart, which gave completeness to his character. The Apostles were aware of this, and, therefore, when they desired the congregation to choose men whom they might ordain as their assistants in the Ministry, they desired them to select men *full of the Holy Ghost* and of wisdom. (Acts vi. 3.) The Holy Ghost, as here spoken of, meant not the gift of the ministry: for the Apostles had not yet laid their hands upon these Candidates for the Diaconate, but were only pointing out what sort of men *they* ought to be whom they could accept as candidates. And what was expected of a Stephen, or of a Barnabas, as a Christian man, is simply what is expected of each one of you. You have all been taught to say that the Holy Spirit sanctifieth you, and all the elect people of God. That sanctifying process should be always going forward, and bringing you into conformity with the perfect pattern of holiness which was exhibited by your Lord. The Spirit was promised by Him, not merely as the Bestower of miraculous gifts, but the Giver of spiritual life, and to Him therefore you must continually look for the maintenance of that spiritual life that He has given. Without that spiritual life, we are virtually aliens from Christ, as S. Paul says (Rom. viii. 9) "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." But if we have that Spirit of Christ, we shall also walk in the Spirit, or live according to that Spirit.

Let me hope, brethren, that such is the case with you:

we have long been united as a congregation, and have worshipped God together :—O that during these many years we may have been growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. And this I am sure you have done, if you have prayed continually for that presence of His Spirit in your hearts. You have been constant in the use of the appointed means of grace : you have shewn much liberality, much earnestness, much zeal : you have proved, in a variety of ways, your honour for God's house, and your personal affection for His minister. I cannot be otherwise than grateful to you for the confidence that you have shewn in me, and I trust that I may be allowed yet a little longer to be useful to you. And if there be one exhortation, which I would specially impress upon you, now, on this our Dedication Festival, it would be that of S. Barnabas to the converts at Antioch, " that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord."

SERMON XIII.

H A R V E S T .

(In an Unfruitful Year.)

S. JOHN IV. 37.

“One soweth, and another reapeth.”

THE author of a good proverb is a great benefactor to man: He wraps up an important lesson in a very few words, so as to render it available to others under widely different circumstances. For nothing, perhaps, is wise Solomon so deservedly remembered, as for his *Proverbs*, of which a few only are preserved in the Book which bears that title, while many others of them may be still surviving in the memory of the people, though they are no longer attributed to him. Our Saviour, the greatest of all Teachers, did not disdain, on many occasions, to avail Himself of the proverbs which were current in His time,

in order to impress His lessons on the mind of those who heard them. Here, for example, while pointing out to His disciples the probability that *they* will be privileged to trace hereafter the result of *His* present labours among the Samaritans, He uses a proverb connected with the Harvest, of which they even then beheld the promise, in the whitening of the fields around them, "One soweth and another reapeth."

It was true of the natural harvest, as their own experience could witness. The husbandman sent out one man to plough, another to scatter the seed upon his furrows, another in due time to reap the corn, when it had sprung up and ripened. He would thus apportion and distribute his work, sometimes because he saw one labourer to be fittest for this work, another for that : sometimes because the sower might have deserted his service before reaping time was come : sometimes even because between the spring and the autumn the labourer first employed had been called away from all earthly work. But whether one man or another were employed, the harvest would be gathered all the same, and the balance of work on the farm maintained as usual.

It was true of the spiritual harvest also, of which our Lord was giving a picture, when He thus spoke of the natural harvest to be gathered on the fields of Samaria. He saw, in the crowd of villagers even then drawing near to Him from Sychar, the whitening, as it were, of a harvest to be reaped hereafter, when Philip should come

down to baptize converts in Samaria, and Peter and John should complete the work of that Evangelist by laying hands on the believers. (Acts viii. 12-25.) *His own* work would have been the laborious task of sowing, *theirs* the joyous labour of ingathering : as expressed by Him here, in another proverb, " Other men have laboured, ye have entered into their labours."

He was far from repining at this, as if He could have desired or expected to see immediate results from what He was doing. He knew full well that which He beautifully expressed on another occasion in a parable, " So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground ; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself ; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come." (Mark iv. 26.) The seed sown requires to be gradually developed before it can be profitable, and when the profit is gained, it is not for the solitary benefit of the man employed in sowing, or of the man whose duty it is to reap, but for the whole community of the village, for whose sustenance the husbandman is providing, while He cultivates his land. They, whatever has been their province of labour, rejoice together with him in the day of his harvest home. And so, in like manner, the great Lord of the Harvest, when He sends forth His angels to

be the reapers of the earth's spiritual harvest, will rejoice with those whom He has employed in doing His work, in whatever capacity they have been engaged: and will call upon them also to rejoice with Him.

It is very possible that some of you who are here present may see a special application of the proverb cited by our Lord, in the harvest of the present year. It is said to be, in general, very unsatisfactory, as compared with the harvests of most years, under the present system of careful cultivation. Many a man, who sowed his field last year, in the hope of an abundant crop, is sadly disappointed, and says, "Another reapeth: at least I do not:" and there is therefore much loss and consequent discontent on the part of those who have not learned the important lesson of acquiescing in the arrangements of Divine Providence. And yet, after all, though the loss of individuals may be very heavy, and the whole agricultural population of the country may be much discouraged, there is not among us that great suffering which a bad harvest always brought in ancient times, and would have brought in our days, but for certain legislative changes, which have been made within our memory. We may some of us have doubted, at the time, of the wisdom of those changes, and regarded with fear the prospect of depending upon any fields but our own for the supply of our bread. But we have long seen the impossibility of our small island producing corn enough for the food of its vastly increased population, even under the most

favourable circumstances. And we now fully appreciate the prudence of having thrown open our ports to receive the corn grown in other lands, whose labourers have been encouraged by the hope of an English market to sow and reap corn to a far greater extent than is required for their own needs. The vast plains of Eastern Europe and Western America have teemed with grain. Our own ships, however, have been employed to bring it over to us, at such prices as enable us to purchase a supply for our wants. There has, therefore, been among us, of late years, occasional scarcity and distress, but not famine, and its frequent consequences, pestilence and political disaffection, each of which has in other days followed upon a failing harvest. Other men have profited by our need, it is true, but it is a subject of rejoicing that they have been able to supply us in that need. And we may surely, without being accused of a lack of patriotism, refrain from envying them that prosperity which has enabled them to help us, and which is increased by the profit of that help. There is, as it were, a solidarity in the great human family, which may enable us unselfishly to rejoice in the good fortune of any member of that family.

And, moreover, so little can learned men tell us, after all their scientific investigations of the varied processes of fertilization, that we cannot venture to say whether the prolonged rainy season of this year may not have been really necessary for our fields, and whether they may not next year be all the more productive for the moisture that

they have now imbibed. The secret of all this is in the mind of Him "who maketh His sun to shine upon the evil and the good, and sendeth rain upon the just and the unjust." (Matt. v. 45.)

But independently of this, a great moral lesson is enforced upon us by Him who keeps in His own hands the reins of His own world, and has ever been both wise and merciful under the most afflictive circumstances. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" said faithful Abraham, when God had announced to him an approaching judgment, by which his own kindred seemed likely to be overwhelmed. (Gen. xviii. 25.) That acknowledgment made, however, Abraham did not give himself over to idleness, as some fatalist might have done, but applied his energies to earnest intercessory prayer, which was so far successful as to ensure the safety of Lot's household, and nearly also to snatch the guilty city in which he dwelt from its impending overthrow. For indeed we cannot venture to say whether Sodom might not have been spared, had the Patriarch's faith been a little stronger, and his intercession continued a little further. Each time he prayed, he obtained that which he sought: and it was only his own unwillingness to believe that there could be so few as ten righteous men in a great city, that led him to desist from prayer. And thus also, under the pressure of such a calamity as a long-continued rain, it may be that if we do but pray with sufficient earnestness and patience, the apprehended ill

consequence of a "plague of immoderate rain and waters" may be averted from us.

We are well aware that men, who discredit intercessory prayer, lay great stress upon the existence of great natural laws, and ridicule the notion of the action of these laws being ever set aside, in answer to human prayer. But these laws themselves, we must remember, so far as they are known to us, are but man's observation of the usual action of the Almighty God, from whom they proceed. We have no right to think of Him as though He had made Himself a slave to His own laws,—still less to fancy that those laws can take effect independently of His Divine Will and Wisdom. Indeed, we know of instances, in which He has made these laws apparently give way to the prayers of His Saints. Thus, at the word of Moses, the Lord rained upon the land of Egypt : and when afterwards at Pharaoh's entreaty, Moses spread forth his hands unto the Lord, the thunders and hail ceased and the rain was not poured upon the earth. (Exodus ix. 22-34.) Thus, when Samuel in like manner called upon the Lord, He sent thunder and rain. (1 Sam. xii. 18.) And thus Elijah also prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not ; he prayed again and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit. (James v. 17, 18.)

These instances, which I have cited in the words of Scripture, are doubtless written for our learning ; and they are enforced by our Lord's direct lesson, that where

two or three of us agree as touching what we ask, we shall receive it, if it be good for us, and consistent with His general providence. (Mat. xviii. 19.) And in reliance on this promise an Apostle, who must have heard it, gives us, as the result of his own experience, "This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us : and if we know that He heareth us, we know that we have the petitions that we desire of Him." (1 John v. 14, 15.)

I need not remind you, brethren, that we have for many years observed the same day of the year for our public Harvest Thanksgiving. And now that the appointed day has arrived, I believe that I should be wanting to my duty, if I had either omitted its observance because of this unfavourable season, or neglected to explain my reasons for celebrating it as usual. It is not yet too late for the mournful anticipations of the many to be falsified, and the hopes of the few to be realized, in the securing of a harvest not far below the average. The prayers offered in this and other Churches have in some degree been already granted, and it may be that they may yet be more clearly answered as time passes on. Instead therefore of repining, let us rise to the faith of Habakkuk (iii. 17, 18), "Though the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vine ; though the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat ; though the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and be no herd in the stall ; yet I will rejoice in the

Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

And how should a Christian congregation like ours shew forth their gratitude to God, for what He has done, and we trust will still do for us? First, as we have done already by repairing to His House, and expressing our praise with the best member that we have, but especially by receiving the Cup of salvation which is offered us to-day. And then how shall we apply the thank offering which we make at the Holy Communion? Were there around us in our parish any great distress, beyond what could be met by ordinary means, no doubt our contributions would be well applied to its relief. But, thanks be to God, this is not the case, and we may, therefore, think of the spiritual needs of those who have gone out from us into distant lands, and of the heathen among whom their lot is cast. Of these we are forcibly reminded in our text by the thought of those who streamed forth from their Samaritan village to listen to Him who sat at Jacob's Well.

Our Lord had compassion on them, and delayed His journey two days that He might teach them. And shall not we have compassion on those who are in equal need of instruction? I need not explain to you how we may do this, by sending our alms to that Society for the Propagation of the Gospel which we have regularly supported here. We cannot ourselves go forth to do the work, but we may help to enable others to do so. We may not see the results of the Mission work in our own day, but we

may hope that others may do so at a later day—for, as our Lord said, “One soweth and another reapeth.”

“We are sowers, and full seldom reapers,
For life's harvest ripens when we die,
'Tis in death alone God gives His sleepers
All for which they sigh.
Cast thy bread upon the waters ; after
Many mornings, when thy head is low,
Men shall gather it with songs and laughter,
Though thou mayst not know.”

In this faithful hope, brethren, let us contribute to the Missions of our Church, and look forward to the day when the infant Churches that we help to plant may themselves be centres of fresh mission work.

And ought not the thought sometimes to occur to us, that our own Church of S. Barnabas also is an instance of the truth of the proverbial saying of our text, “One soweth and another reapeth.” Other men sowed, who built this Church some fifty years ago, and established its Schools, and set on foot gradually its parochial institutions ; you have entered into their labours—you have found all these things ready to your hands, and have but to keep them going. For this then surely some gratitude is due to God, and I hope that it will find a worthy expression in your offertory to-day.

SERMON XIV.

THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE PLAGUE OF OUR OWN HEART.

I KINGS VIII. 38-40.

“What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man or by all Thy people Israel, which shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and spread forth his hands towards this house : then hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart Thou knowest (for Thou, even Thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men ;) That they may fear Thee all the days that they live in the land which Thou gavest unto our fathers.”

SOME modern critics have complained that the Parable of the Pharisee and Publican gives an entirely mistaken idea of the Jewish Temple and its use, in saying “two men went up to the Temple to pray.” (Luke xviii. 10). The Jewish Temple, they are fond of telling us, was not a

house of prayer, but a house of sacrifice. In answer to this statement it will not be necessary to cite passages from the Old Testament which describe men praying in the Temple : it will be enough to present such a passage as our text, which indicates the intention of the great Founder of the Temple himself. Though he certainly inaugurated the Temple with many costly sacrifices, and no doubt continued to offer sacrifice in it from day to day, after the Mosaic ritual ; yet in his prayer of dedication he makes no mention of such sacrifice, but speaks rather of the prayer of the afflicted rising up to heaven, from the temple, which he has erected in honour of the God of Heaven.

It has often been said that Solomon was the wisest of men ; and we, many of us, take the assertion very much as truth ; judging of his wisdom chiefly from the acute and prudent sayings which are collected as his Proverbs. But this Prayer of his, which was doubtless the result of much thought, as he was not likely to come hastily and inconsiderately before God on so momentous an occasion, is full of the highest and holiest wisdom. In no part of it, however, is this wisdom more conspicuous, than in the short phrase which describes the cause which sends men to God's House to pray, as " the knowledge which each man has of the plague of his own heart."

Our first parents had no such knowledge, while they dwelt in Paradise, in the sunshine of God's favour. They were able *everywhere* to lift up holy hands to Him, and

were sure of being heard. They had no want ungratified, and their devotion was one continued act of faith and thanksgiving. But it was otherwise with them when they had acquired the knowledge of evil by tasting the forbidden fruit; thenceforth they were conscious of a plague in their own heart, and transmitted the fatal infection of that plague to their offspring, and among them to ourselves. This consciousness of the plague of their heart induced them, doubtless under Divine guidance, to offer the first of all sacrifices: and a similar consciousness on the part of their Martyr son Abel, made his sacrifice acceptable. On the other hand, the rebellion of Cain's will against this consciousness, and his determination to act as if no such plague were in his heart, led to the rejection of his offering, which was one of gratitude merely, such as a fallen creature had no right to offer, till he had first been cleansed by an atoning sacrifice. The same consciousness, confirmed by the sight of a world dispeopled in punishment of the sin of its inhabitants, led Noah, on first issuing from the Ark, to offer up a sacrifice which God accepted. The same consciousness is conspicuous in the History of Abraham, and may be traced in his erection at every halting place in his pilgrimage, of an altar for atoning sacrifice. The same consciousness led Job, in the days of his prosperity, to offer periodical sacrifices in behalf of his children. And the same consciousness, enlarged and directed by Almighty God, led Moses to arrange the elaborate sacrificial system, which

is contained in the Pentateuch, and was carried out in the fullest manner by King Solomon in his glorious Temple. The same consciousness is expressed by all the Prophets in their turn, as they urge God's people to penitence, and bid them offer the appointed sacrifices. Of course we do not suppose for a moment that the Patriarchs, and Prophets, and other Great Teachers of the Jewish nation in bright succession, knew the word *original sin*, or could define it in the accurate manner that the New Testament enables us to do. But at least they practically knew the great fact, and acted upon their knowledge, coming before their God, first with the blood of an atoning sacrifice, and then with prayer, which they hoped might for the sake of that sacrifice be received. Doubtless they knew that the life of an animal was an insufficient atonement : and they must have considered it to be the type of a better sacrifice, to be hereafter paid. But they did not, for that, presumptuously discontinue the offering, and come before their God unsanctified by Sacrificial Blood. And what they knew in part, we are allowed to know perfectly. We have been taught to look on Jesus Christ as the Lamb slain in God's eternal counsels from the beginning of the world, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. (Rev. xiii. 8, Heb. xiii. 8). We have been allowed to see Him in the raptured visions of S. John still attesting His Sacrifice by His appearance, even in the visions of heaven, as *a Lamb that has been slain* (Rev. v. 6), still accepting the prayers

of His saints, and permitting them to be offered with the perfume of the golden censer, before His Father's throne (Rev. viii. 3). And among that cloud of prayer, that rises before His Throne continually, are there not, brethren, it is for you to ask the question of yourselves,—are there not many petitions of yours?

For *what* is it that sends us to Church? what induces us to raise stately structures, and to repair to them with our offering of prayer, but our knowledge of the plague of our own hearts? And indeed, we not only come hither ourselves, but we even bring our unconscious infants to God's Temple, and dedicate them as God's soldiers and servants, trusting that He who has made known to us the existence of this plague even in the first days of infancy, will so regenerate the infants brought to Him at His font, that "all carnal affections may die in them, and that all things belonging to the Spirit may live and grow in them."

Such, as you are all aware, is the prayer uttered in behalf of your children, when they are brought to Christian Baptism—and it is a prayer that is doubtless registered on high. But the work there described is not done once for all—the mortification of our worldly lusts, and the consequent growth of the purity of the Spirit, is a gradual work, spread sometimes over many years, indeed never quite completed till the last hour of mortal life. For this reason you continue to instruct your children from day to day, in their duty to God and to their neigh-

bour. For this reason you bring them, when they are old enough to understand it, to the public services of this holy house, and teach them to join their little hands in prayer. For this reason you encourage them, at a later day, to offer themselves as Candidates for Confirmation, and expect them immediately afterwards to receive the Lord's Supper, the appointed means of grace for those who have been baptized into Christ, and have a thankful remembrance of His precious Death.

But is this all that you can do? Do you simply shew your children the right road, and urge them to follow it? or do you follow it also yourselves? I trust you do: for unless you do, your instructions will have little weight with your children. They will not be long deceived:—they will readily form their reasonable conclusions on the inconsistency of those who teach and do not; and as soon as they are free from your control, they will follow your example rather than your precept. For this reason, therefore, among many others, I trust that you come regularly to the House of God. When the morning dawns, before you go to your daily toil, of whatever kind it be, how blessed a thing is it for you to repair to God's House, and acknowledging the plague of your own hearts, their weakness, their wilfulness, their rebelliousness, to pray with the congregation for aid and support amid the perils of the day! How blessed a thing, during the day, though but for a moment, and with a scarcely uttered word, to recall the devotions of the morning! How blessed again,

at the end of the day, to come to Church once more, to acknowledge with contrition your shortcomings, to appropriate the words of absolution, and to depart homeward with the assurance of God's forgiveness for Christ's sake !

But some one will say, " I know not the plague of my own heart. I do not believe that there is in it any tendency to evil. I believe that it was at my birth as a sheet of blank paper, that some good and some evil have since been written upon it, but that I have been and still am as free to choose good as evil. Why should I then live in this constant fear of evil? why should I make such constant appeals to the Almighty to implant in me, and keep in me, good thoughts, and to lead me to the performance of good actions? Is it not more manly to do my best, without requiring Divine aid? To use the powers that are given me, without asking for more? And I do not believe that I am likely to fail in my honest endeavour." This is sad language—and one may well wonder that it should ever be used by men who call themselves Christians. Indeed it shews great want of self-knowledge on the part of those who have ventured thus to express themselves. Their experience is, we may at least say, strangely at variance with that of some of the most saintly men that have ever lived. But let us bring it to the test of Scripture. The account of the world immediately after the flood is (Gen. viii. 21) "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." Job (xiv. 4) asked concerning the heart of man, "Who can bring a clean

out of an unclean?" David (Psalm li. 5) confessed that he was "shapen in iniquity, and in sin did his mother conceive him." Solomon, in addition to the words of our text, declared (Eccles. vii. 20) that "there was not a just man upon earth, that did good and sinned not." And Isaiah prepared the world for the necessary sacrifice of Christ, by the acknowledgment, (liii. 6) "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way." What are these but emphatic denials, on the part of some of the best and most experienced men of the old dispensation, of the theory that would represent the heart of man to be free from natural taint and corruption?

To these we may add, from the New Testament, some similar passages. Our Lord, the highest of all authorities as to what was in man, asserted (Matt. xix. 17) that "there was none good but One, that is God;" and that (John iii. 5) "no man could enter into the Kingdom of God, except he were born again of water and of the Spirit." And St. Paul, in like manner, tells us that (Rom. iii. 9, 23) "all are under sin, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God," nay, that (Rom. v. 12) "Death hath passed on all men, for that all have sinned." More passages than these we surely need not allege, to shew that the Scriptures of the New Testament are at one with those of the Old, on this momentous subject.

So much for the objection of him who believes that man is born free from sin,—and has therefore no plague in his natural heart. But there is another class of

objectors, with whom we have to deal. They will generally allow the truth of what we have just been urging as to the corruption of the natural heart of man. But they go on to argue—The very words which you have cited, spoken by our Lord to Nicodemus, shew that He even then contemplated a remedy for the sin of man, when He said, “Ye must be born again.” Such a remedy He afterwards established in Holy Baptism, when He bid His disciples baptize in the Name of the Holy Trinity, and added (Mark xvi. 16) “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” Acting upon this commission, S. Peter, a few days afterwards, while yet under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, said to those who were anxiously asking after the way to salvation (Acts ii. 38), “Repent and be baptized.” With all earnestness and solemnity then it is asked, by those who feel the value of that Holy Baptism to which they have been admitted, “Is it right for us, after our admission to that blessed Sacrament, to speak of the plague of our own hearts?” Yes, brethren, we reply, it is right. For although the condemnation of original sin is removed in Baptism, so that infants dying immediately after Baptism are certainly saved—still the taint, or, as our text says, the plague of it is not yet removed. The regenerate man has still a battle to fight against the corruption of his own heart. This is the general lesson of S. Peter, who, addressing the baptized as new born babes in Christ, yet exhorts them to “abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.” (1 Pet. ii. 2, 11)

And in the same tone speaks the Apostle, St. Paul, (1 Cor. ix. 27): "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest I should be a castaway." He bids the Christians of Galatia (Gal. vi. i.), restore their brethren who may be overtaken in a fault, considering their own frailty, "lest they also be tempted." And in the same tone of warning he bids the Colossian Christians, who were risen with Christ, and might therefore aspire to things above, (Col. iii. 1-9), to mortify their earthly members, and refrain from a long list of vices, which had been indeed natural to that old man, which they had put off, but were most unsuited to that new man, which they had put on. To this we may add the testimony of S. James, the most practical of Christian teachers (iii. 2) "In many things we offend, all;" and of S. John, the nearest of the disciples to His Lord, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." (1 John i. 8.)

How humble ought these passages to make us before God! How ought we to tremble at the thought of our sinfulness! to acknowledge the plague of our own heart, and to repair to God's House to offer such prayers as our Saviour has commanded us to make there, that we be not led into temptation, but delivered from evil!

I have no doubt that the ancient ritual of the Temple was well suited for the case of those who came to it, in and after Solomon's days, to pour out their complaint before God, in the consciousness of the plague of their

own heart, and in the full desire to be healed of it. But little, however, of that ritual has come down to us beyond the details of the sacrifices, unless, indeed, as has been supposed, the earliest devotions of the Christian Church, preserved in the most ancient Liturgies, were to a certain extent derived from the ritual of the Jewish Temple.

But whether this be so or not, the worship of God in our own Church in this country is excellently adapted for the same purpose. What do we, on first entering God's House, but listen to passages which impress upon us the fact which has brought us thither, the fact that we are defiled with sin? And how do we then commence our actual devotion but by humble confession of sin? what words do we wait for, after that confession, but words of absolution, pronounced over us, on God's part, by His minister? And when we have sung God's praises in the Psalms, and listened to His Holy Word, and asked for what is requisite for our bodies and our souls, what do we but gather round the Lord's Table, to receive the precious Elements that He has blessed, and shew forth His Death till He come?

Happy, brethren, are we in this land, that we have such a Prayer-book as that used in our Church! so completely based upon the ancient Christian Service-books, and yet so admirably adapted to the wants of the present day! so full of humility, of faith, of piety, of charity! I fear we are not half so grateful as we ought to be to God for this His gracious gift to us, in which we are able so fully

to seek the remedy, as it were, of the plague of our own heart, in God's Holy House.

But here some one may, with all sincerity, object, "Is it not possible to lay too much stress upon public devotion, and may it not degenerate into mere formality? It may, we answer,—but the fear of such an abuse must not be allowed to interfere with the proper use of public prayer. Neither in the ancient dispensation, nor in our own, is the mere form of devotion, apart from its spirit, considered to be of any value at all. We have to do with a God that knoweth the heart, and that cannot be deceived with the mere semblance of devotion. For what says our text? "Hear Thou from Heaven Thy dwelling-place, and forgive, or do, or give, to every man, according to his ways, *whose heart Thou knowest.*" According to the feeling of our *heart*, not according to the expression of our lips, will be success of our prayer—and how great has been that success, in many instances, we know, all of us, from history, and most of us, I hope, from our own experience. In vain we tread the courts of God's House, in vain we join in the prayers, in vain we receive the Blessed Sacrament of Communion with Christ, if our hearts are not engaged in the devotion which we seem to share.

And yet again, another objection may be made. In speaking so strongly of public devotion, we may be thought to disparage family and private devotion. No, brethren, so far from it, we maintain that no one can be

really devout in public who is not so in private. The solitary prayer is the best preparation for the prayer of the family, the family prayer for the prayer of the Church, Nor is even this point unprovided for in our text. Solomon speaks, not merely of prayers offered in the Temple, but offered anywhere towards the Temple. It was for the acceptance of such prayer offered elsewhere, as well as of the public worship of the sanctuary, that he besought God, while dedicating his Temple. The praying towards the Temple, and thus, as it were, localising the devotion, had its meaning, in that ancient dispensation. The typical sacrifices, offered in atonement for the sins of men, formed, as we have seen, the ground on which men's prayers were to be accepted. How natural then that the eyes of the worshipper should, during his act of worship, be directed to the place where alone such sacrifices could properly be offered. In accordance with this feeling, we find the Psalmist, most likely David, before the foundation of Solomon's Temple, worshipping towards God's sanctuary, and lifting up his eyes to the hills, by which it was surrounded, believing that thence his help was to come. (Psalm cxxi. 1.) And, even when Solomon's Temple lay in ruins, we find the captive prophet, Daniel, in the same spirit, opening the window of his house towards Jerusalem, before commencing his private devotions. (Dan. vi. 10).

And so we, in like manner, centralise our devotion, not by raising our natural eyes to the Temple, or to one spot

on earth, but by looking upward with the eyes of our spirit to the Throne of God, where Christ sitteth, having obtained eternal redemption for us by His precious Blood. In His pure atonement alone we trust ;—and so, wherever we may be, we worship Him in spirit and in truth. (John iv. 24).

Christian brethren, is your devotion such as this ? If it is, all then is well—your prayers are heard, even while you make them. Your Lord is ready to answer, even before you have begun to cry to Him, (Dan. ix. 21-23) for He knoweth the hearts, as my text says, of the children of men. But if such be not the case with you, think maturely on the subject, and find out for yourselves what is the real cause that gives hollowness to your devotion, faithlessness to your conduct, irreligion to your whole life. Surely such a life as this is not worth living—a life of alienation from God—a life spent for this world, and yet unsatisfied with its own enjoyments ! A life which has its termination here, and has no continuance or renewal beyond the grave !

Brethren, I hope better things of you. I believe that the knowledge of the plague of your own heart has kept you humble before God, and compassionate to your fellow-creatures. It has brought you here to pray in the congregation, and it leads you to pray with equal fervour in your solitude at home. And you have your reward. The plague is not indeed removed—it will not be while you are still on trial : but it is already far less inveterate,

and it is no source of corruption to those around you. Your life is spent in doing good in one way or other, not that you may have whereof to boast before God, but that you may shew forth continually your gratitude to Him, who has made you know your own faults, and has enabled you more fully to cope with and overcome them,—to Him, who has shed for you His reconciling Blood, and poured out upon you a full measure of His Holy Spirit's influence.

Only go on as you have begun ; forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, nor isolate yourselves to think of your own sorrows, sins, and joys ; but sympathise in your prayers with those of others also. Those who worship with you are conscious of the same plague that troubles your heart. They and you are fighting the same battle. If you on some occasions have been beaten, you may still give thanks that others have been victorious. If you have been successful, you may still sympathise with those who are almost in despair at some inglorious defeat. Rejoice in the hope, not of a solitary throne, but of an humble place among the unnumbered mansions that fill the City of God, and in the anticipation of seeing many who pray around you now, rejoicing with you hereafter in the Paradise of God.

SERMON XV.

CONTEMPLATIVE PIETY.

PSALMS XXVII, 4.

“One thing have I desired of the LORD ; that will I seek after ; that I may dwell in the House of the LORD all the days of my life ; to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in His Temple.”

LUKE x. 42.

“One thing is needful : and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”

THERE are few more interesting narratives in any book than the five verses at the end of the tenth chapter of S. Luke, which record our Lord's first visit to the family of Bethany. And I suppose that few happier hours were spent by Him, during His Mission of Mercy, than those which He passed under that hospitable roof. S. Luke,

writing probably while some members of the family were living, gives no hint of their dwelling-place, lest he should draw down upon them the persecuting animosity of the unbelieving Jews ; but merely speaks of it as " a certain village ;" and it was reserved for S. John, when he had long outlived both his companions, and their persecutors, to point out that the village was called Bethany, and to describe the manner in which our Lord resorted thither for quiet and refreshment, evening after evening, during the last week of His Ministry. The family were most probably better provided with this world's goods than most of the early believers in our Lord. We judge so, from the burial of Lazarus in a rock-hewn sepulchre, such as was generally prepared for the rich ; from the coming of Jewish Rulers from Jerusalem to comfort his bereaved sisters ; and from the costliness of the ointment of spike-nard, with which the grateful Mary anointed her Redeemer's Head. It was not, however, we may be sure, for their wealth, but for something much better, for their faith, that the Lord " loved Martha, and Mary, and Lazarus." (John xi. 5.)

Of Martha we have little to say at present : suffice it for us that the Lord loved her : and that she was therefore a person of saintly character, even in the midst of her carefulness about household matters, and her momentary jealousy of her sister's apparent inaction. (Luke x. 40—42.) It was for our Lord's entertainment that she was thus solicitous, and for His honour that she

wished to see her sister working. It was therefore, no doubt, in all kindness and gratitude that He spoke the gentle words of reproof, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things." And we have little doubt that these simple words were blessed to her. Her faith failed not, even when her brother had been called away—"Lord," said she, in that trying hour, when Jesus met her after her bereavement, "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died : but I know that even now, whatsoever Thou wilt ask of God, He will give it Thee." (John xi. 21—24.) She, the woman of practical, active piety, could rise to as high a belief in the Lord Jesus as was reached by any of His followers. And we have but said these few words concerning her, because many persons have thought it necessary to depreciate her character, in order to raise by contrast that of her sister. So will not we do : God gives various talents to each of His servants, and is satisfied if only each of them, by the aid of His Blessed Spirit, improves his talents, and does what he can.

It is of Mary that we wish especially to speak at present : and it would seem as if, according to our Lord's own testimony, she had taken for her object of aspiration the mind which was in David of old, as described by him in the 27th Psalm : "One thing have I desired of the Lord, which I will require, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the fair beauty of the Lord, and to visit His Temple." There is

more than general resemblance, there is almost coincidence, between these words and those which our Lord spoke when he looked down upon the earnest face of her who sat at His feet, and listened to His words: "One thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

David, we must remember, was no religious dreamer: no rapt enthusiast, who would neglect the duties of his station when He was Saul's confidential servant, or his higher duties when he was the King of God's people, to meditate in the tabernacle, or in some oratory of his own. He worked for God, for his king, and for his subjects, with all earnestness and diligence: but he gained the strength for such work by his religious contemplation, and returned to it again after his work, or during its intervals, with increased delight, as the words of our text imply. So was it then, we doubt not, with Mary. Though her sister may not at the moment have understood her, she had given her attention to household matters before seating herself at our Lord's feet to listen to His golden words. Indeed, that she was not inattentive to His comfort, we learn by her pouring upon His Sacred Head that ointment which proved, though she knew it not, the unction for His burial: a service which drew from Him not merely a well-earned word of praise, but a promise that her action should be recorded for a memorial of earnest piety wherever the Gospel should be preached in the whole world. (Matt. xxvi. 13.)

But for what purpose did David, according to his own account, visit the Temple of God? His own words inform us: "To behold the fair beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in His Temple." No doubt he devoted Himself to the study of God's law, of which the original manuscript was preserved in the Tabernacle, and of which he had most probably made a copy for himself, according to the command given in the Book of Deuteronomy to the future King of Israel. (Deut. xvii. 18, 19) In it he had learned to behold the fair beauty of the Lord, the harmony of His divine attributes, the holiness of His requirements from man, and the justice of His dealings with all His creatures. And even beyond this, he may have been able, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to gain a prophetic knowledge of Him in whom the fair beauty of the Lord was to become visible in human form, of whom He was Himself to be a type, and a forerunner. No doubt in his intercourse with Samuel, Ahimelech, Abiathar, and Zadok, he must have gained stores of precious knowledge; and from each of them in turn he had enquired the will of God, by the appointed yet mysterious means. (Exodus xxviii. 30, Num. xxvii. 21.)

And thus also, we may well believe, the maiden of Bethany, who has been to Christians the model of contemplative piety, rejoiced in the opportunity of looking up to the fair beauty of God in human form, displayed in Him who had honoured her poor dwelling with His presence. The very sight of His calm features was a lesson:

and highly privileged were they who thus beheld them : but a greater privilege was it to hear the words which fell from His lips. We form some idea of His manner of conversation from the last discourses of His preserved by S. John, in which He poured out stores of gentle wisdom to His disciples, taking up their words, and carrying on their thoughts, while He solved their difficulties, or dispelled their doubts. It was in the midst of these disciples that He was sitting in the house of Bethany, when Mary placed herself at His feet, and listened to His words. And in so doing, her Lord assured her she had chosen a good part, which should not be taken from her. She acquired from thence a wisdom which guided her in the affairs of life : a faith which was unshaken even by our Lord's delay to come to her brother's sick bed : a firmness which enabled her to bear up under the weight of her bereavement : a love which thought no cost too great for the honour of Him who called her brother forth from the grave : a calmness which supported her through the trying scenes of the last week of the Lord's ministry. None of the Evangelists have told us whether Mary of Bethany was with Mary Magdalene, among the faithful women who stood by the Cross, and visited the Tomb : but we can hardly doubt that this was the case with one who even before our Lord's death anointed His Body for the burial. Scripture tells but little of female saints : their virtues shine more conspicuously in their own homes, except when persecution calls them into notice, and then

they are seldom found wanting. The history of the martyrs of Lyons and of Africa, and others like them at various periods of history, shows that women who, like Mary, choose early a good part, and cast in their lot with their Divine Master, have never had cause to lament the averting of His face : and in the time of trouble, He has hid them in His tabernacle : yea, in the secret place of His dwelling has He hid them, and set them up upon a rock of stone." Not in vain has He said, "Seek ye My Face"—not in vain have they replied, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek." In the day of their deliverance they have made David's confession, "I should utterly have fainted : but that I believe verily to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." And they have left this faithful exhortation for those who have come after them, in the same Psalmist's words, "Tarry thou the Lord's leisure : be strong, and He shall comfort thy heart ; and put thou thy trust in the Lord." (Ps. xxvii. 5, 8, 15, 16.)

Now I am sure, brethren, that there were no sources of comfort open to David, or to Mary of Bethany, which are not equally accessible to us. It was not at all times that David could repair to the House of the Lord, in order to enjoy the consciousness of His presence. And it was only at very long intervals that Mary could sit at our Saviour's feet and listen to His words. But when David was a fugitive, an exile : when he was toiling on the field of battle : when he was taking council with the elders of his kingdom, or dispensing justice from his

throne : under whatever circumstances he might find himself, the good thing that he had required would not be taken from him. The sacred precepts that he had learned remained in his memory, and were written in his heart. And so in like manner, when Mary was engaged with her sister in household duties : when she was watching by the sick bed of Lazarus, when she was tending the declining and afflicted years of her father Simon the leper, the good part was still hers, though her Lord's face was no longer visible to her eyes. Indeed our Lord assured His disciples that it was even expedient for them that He should go away ; and spake of the presence of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, as a greater advantage than His own personal presence.

We have among us temples of God ever open for our willing feet. Daily services of prayer and praise, in which we can draw near to Him, sing the Psalms of David, and hear the very words to which Mary listened. And I would that more of us were aware of the privilege of attending upon the daily worship of the Church. We cannot be in bodily presence always there : but we can carry about with us the memory of what we have heard there : and we can, in the midst of the haunts of men, and under all the distractions of our daily business, recal the words of Him, whose life was not less busy than ours, and yet who retired from it not unfrequently to place Himself in His Father's immediate presence. We have those words recorded for us in a precious volume, in

the devout study of which we may seat ourselves, as it were, at His feet, far oftener than Mary was able to be in his actual presence ; and the Holy Spirit will take His words and so bring them home to our heart and conscience, as to be the source of never-failing comfort. I trust, brethren, that you are aware of this privilege, and avail yourselves of it to the full. In so doing, you have chosen that good part which Mary chose, and which can no more be taken away from you than it could from her. And besides this, you have another privilege, at intervals, the greatness of which can hardly be exaggerated. Before your Saviour finished His ministry, He appointed a sacred Feast, and said "This do in remembrance of Me." And this His ministering servants have ever done, from that day to this, as the first day of the week comes round, and reminds them of His resurrection. His simple Board is spread : the Bread and Wine which He commanded to be received are there. The Master calls you towards Him in His own words, "Come unto Me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden." He breaks the Bread and pours the Wine, and appropriates them to faithful partakers with the words, "The Body of the Lord Jesus Christ which was given for thee : " the Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ which was shed for thee." The right of drawing near and taking the Holy Sacrament to your comfort cannot be forfeited, except by your own act. As long as you are His in heart and hope, you may enjoy this spiritual Sustenance : it is yours, as attached to that good part,

which Mary chose, and which no man could take from her !

And while we receive it, may we not look forward to the greater and more perfect pleasure of meeting our Lord above, surrounded by those His Saints, who first partook with Him that Gospel Feast ; to the joy, of which He mysteriously spake, under the figure of drinking the New Wine in His Father's kingdom ? (Mark xiv. 25). To the joy, to which David looked forward, when he spiritualised the delight of worshipping in an earthly temple : saying, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, which I will seek after : that I may dwell in the House of the Lord, and behold the beauty of the Lord for ever ! "

SERMON XVI.

SEIZE THE PRESENT TIME.

JOHN VII. 6.

"My time is not yet come; but your time is always ready.

ONE of the most painful things to the Lord Jesus, in His human capacity, must have been the fact recorded in this chapter, (at v. 5), that His brethren, according to the flesh, believed not on Him during great part of His ministry. We see, in this incidental statement of S. John, a complete refutation of all those false legends which have been handed down to us concerning the childhood of our Blessed Lord, as if He had wrought miracles even in the cradle, and had interrupted by the display of His superhuman power the childish sports, in which He was engaged with His playfellows at Nazareth. Had such

been the case, it would have been impossible for the members of His own family to doubt the reality of the miracles reported to them as having been done by Him in the early days of His public ministry, and to say incredulously to Him, "If Thou do these things, shew Thyself to the world."

The true state of things indicated by S. John is evidently this :—that Jesus had grown up in Nazareth, like any other child, with no apparent power, though superior to any other child in real holiness. That He had been subject to His Virgin Mother, and to the saintly man, whom, while He lived, the world called His Father. That, as soon as His bodily powers were sufficiently developed, He had worked at an humble trade. That, while so employed, He had set a perfect example, but in no other way had distinguished Himself from His fellow men. That His brethren, simple and uneducated Galilean peasants, with all the obstinacy of their position and of the age in which they lived, having seen nothing in His early life, which, in their opinion, could raise Him above other men, believed not on Him, when He returned from John's Baptism in the power of the Spirit unto Galilee. That when He entered their synagogue, and commenced His Mission there by reading the words from Isaiah (lxi. 1), "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," they believed not that that Spirit was really His : and though they probably took no part, in His expulsion from the Synagogue, or in the attempt to throw Him from the rock, the perhaps

cordially hoped that what they considered His signal discomfort would diminish, or perhaps even extinguish His enthusiasm. (Luke iv. 16—30).

Still, they had since heard of so many miracles performed by Him in other parts of Galilee, though not in their own village, in which He did no mighty work because of men's unbelief, that they became a little doubtful of the correctness of their judgment in refusing to believe in Him, and therefore urged Him to return to Judæa on the occasion of the Feast of Tabernacles, and strengthen by some new miracles the impressions that He had been already made upon the natives in general. He however knew full well the proper time for action, and was not to be impelled to anticipate that time by any step that His better judgment would condemn. He had been in great personal danger in Judæa, last time He was there, and He knew full well that His enemies were on the watch for His appearance at this feast. He was determined to be present at it, but delayed His arrival till the city should be full of those who had seen His works in the country, and would therefore be more prepared to listen to Him in the capital than would those who were chiefly resident there. He, therefore, without explaining Himself to His brethren, simply said, as formerly to His Mother at Cana, "My time is not yet come." Yet, while saying this, He took the opportunity of subjoining a word of admonition to them: "Your time is always ready."

Yes, it was always ready. They had enjoyed greater opportunities than other men. Some of them had stood by His cradle : others had mingled in His childish sports : others had assisted in developing His human mind by education : others had laboured at His side in the workshop of Nazareth : others had heard His preaching in the synagogue, when He commenced His ministry. All had listened to His conversation and contemplated His example, and had thus had every opportunity, if they would, of believing in Him, and enrolling themselves among His followers. But this they had not done. They had remained incredulous, and on one occasion they would have withdrawn Him from His work, if it had been possible, on the plea of His supposed insanity. And it was not till after His Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension, that we find the brethren of the Lord had the courage to appear, as such, publicly among His disciples.

Indeed we know not with any certainty whether all of them ever became Christians—whether a certain number of them did not continue to stand aloof from Him and His Disciples, and so perhaps perish with the disobedient Jewish nation, in the great siege of Jerusalem. It has been ever thus. Noah had brethren, and it may be sons, and son's wives, besides those who were saved in the ark ; yet they perished in the flood. Abraham had brethren, yet they lingered in Ur, or in Haran. Lot had sons, and sons-in-law, yet they regarded him as a mocker in His warnings, and perished in the ruins of the doomed

cities. So may it have been then with some of the relatives of our Lord according to the flesh ; and so perhaps it may be with some of us. And for this reason, as also for many others, our Lord said to them, as He says also to us, "Your time is always ready."

Yes, brethren, your time is always ready ; *now* is the accepted time, *now* is the day of salvation. *Now* you either are in a state of grace, or may be if you will—to-morrow this may be impossible.

Who can say what may have happened before to-morrow's sun arises, either to us all, or to any one of us in particular ? But the present moment is our own. How are we then employing it ? How have we been spending the last hour, while we have been in the House of God ? Have we humbled ourselves in the confession, taken comfort in the absolution, rejoiced in the Psalms, found instruction in the Lessons, examined ourselves on the commandments, prayed for ourselves and for others in the Prayers ? We have had the opportunity for all this—but have we done it all ? or any part of it ? Alas, if the hearts of some of us were examined, they would perhaps be found sadly out of harmony with the devotion in which we seemed to take our part ! This may have been the case even with those whose knees were bowed, and whose gestures were reverent. But how much more with those, who since they entered God's house have sought but to place themselves most at ease, and have suffered their eyes to wander in all directions ! Who can doubt that

their thoughts, so far from being devotional, were at the very ends of the earth !

But people will say, in answer—"Granting that things are as you say, that my thoughts have been thus wandering, how could I help it? I am sure I wished to say my prayers properly in Church, and to return home refreshed and strengthened from my devotions. But I know not how it is, I cannot confine my attention. I cannot help seeing things round about me, and thinking of them. Or even if I confine my eyes to my book, the very words before me, though forming parts of the prayers or lessons, will suggest other ideas, and, before I am aware of it, I am wandering, and discover not the fact till something occurring close to me brings me back to the consideration of where I am, and how I ought to be employed."

It is most true, brethren, this wandering of thought is one of our greatest trials. But still it is a trial which must be met and overcome. You know from whom this trial proceeds. It is the combined work of the three enemies we have renounced, the Flesh, the World, and the Devil. The flesh, that is our body, is weary—there is the beginning. The world,—that is the vanity, which is around us out of church, and which intrudes upon us, even when we are within its sacred walls, suggests thoughts incongruous with the place and time. And the Devil, our ever-watchful enemy, who, though not omnipresent, makes his influence felt in every heart that is willing to admit him, is ready to make us yield to our weariness,

to encourage our worldly thoughts, and to add to them suggestions that are directly sinful. And thus, in many cases, the whole time of our apparent devotion is worse than thrown away. We leave our places, and go forth into society the worse rather than the better for our attendance in the Church, angry with ourselves, vexed with the loss of time, ready to complain, with or without cause, of everything—of the light, or of the darkness—of the rain, or of the sunshine—of the heat, or of the cold,—of our neighbours—of the service—of the sermon—of the minister—of everything but of ourselves.

And this goes on Sunday after Sunday, and because it occurs so often, men say they cannot help it. And yet they can, if they will : their time is always ready. There is One, who, in the time of His Flesh, was tried even as they are, yet not overcome : tempted like as they are, yet without sin. He feels for them and with them, and is ready to help them, if they will : for their time is always ready : what He said to His murmuring brethren, who believed not, He says to all who find at present a difficulty in believing on Him, and holds His arms ever open to receive them to His embrace.

That which is most wanted is calm, collected consideration. Our Lord's brethren wanted this, and those among us, who complain of this lack of earnestness in their devotion, want it too. Had any one of those brethren of our Lord sat calmly down, on some evening after his work was done, on the house-top, as men are

accustomed to do in the east, or without the city gate, under the shade of some ancient tree, and quietly gone over in his mind what Jesus Christ had said and done since he had first known Him—had he taken, for example, His works and words of one single day, passed them in review, and reasoned upon them, he must have come to the conclusion that God was with Him. When he had then further weighed the testimony of John the Baptist, and the reports that every day had brought of the miraculous works, by which, wherever He found faith, Jesus had attested His divine mission—he must, I think, have believed, and would, in consequence, have been accepted as a disciple, and in that capacity have seen further manifestations of the Saviour's power and love. But, for this, apparently, none of these His relatives had yet found leisure. They had time for their business, for their recreation, for their talk on ordinary matters ; but not for the consideration of His claims on their attention, who even then yearned for the salvation of their souls with more than a brother's love.

And so also, we need, more than anything else, meditation : calm, quiet, self-collected communing with our own hearts in our own chamber, before we enter upon an act of public devotion.

A good way to begin this practice is to read over a few verses of Scripture, especially for instance a short portion of our Saviour's history, and then to realise in thought the scene, the appearance, the words, the reference,

the consequence. How much, for instance, might be made in this way of the first nine verses of the Chapter before us ! How long might one meditate upon the scene, until at length the conviction was impressed deeply upon one's mind, "Our time is always ready ; why have we not then made use of it ?"

Or again, the Psalm of invitation as it is called, the xcvith, which we use at every Morning's Service, and which S. Paul so strongly illustrates in the ivth Chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews ;—what a food for meditation does it furnish for us, even in one of its verses—"To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, and in the day of temptation in the wilderness." What a scene is presented in these words, and with what ease may we picture it to ourselves, until at length we cry, "O let us hear Thy voice, O Lord, *to-day*—we will harden our hearts no more, nor provoke Thee by our obstinacy and vain delay."

But these are only outward means of fixing the attention and realising our devotion. We need also more than this. We need the aid of God's Holy Spirit to give vitality to our meditation, strength to our resolution, and life to our devotion. And for this aid we cannot pray in vain. Even before we unclosethe our lips in prayer, we are, as it were, heard, and a message is sent out to strengthen us, as the Angel Gabriel assured the Prophet Daniel (ix. 23) "At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment went forth, and I am come." Not merely a

created Angel will be with us to strengthen us. But the Holy Spirit Himself will be pleading with our spirit, and giving earnestness to our utterance, if we open our hearts for His reception, and grieve Him not by our neglect.

And are there any here, who are troubled with no incredulous doubts—no wandering thoughts, no weariness in prayer? Any also, who not only experience this blessedness themselves, but can bear witness of others, who have been thus sustained, and in the strength thus given have passed happily from their trial to their rest? Let me intreat them to communicate their experience, and that of those whom they have loved and parted with for a time only, to their less experienced friends, who are not yet thus at peace. Let me intreat them to persuade those whom they can influence, and ought to influence, that *their* time is always ready; that He who spoke these sad but loving words to His brethren after the flesh, has equally loving words still for those whom He has admitted His brothers, yes, more than brothers, in receiving them into the communion of His Body, which is the Church of the Redeemed. And if they are disposed to think that He was more willing to receive them—more gracious to His brethren at Nazareth than to others—remind them that when these His brethren after the flesh made an exclusive claim on His attention, He exclaimed, with a heart full of love for those who were willing to come to Him and share His affections, “Who is My Mother, or My brethren? Whosoever shall do the will of

God, the same is My brother, and sister, and Mother !"
(Mark iii. 33, 35.)

And now, brethren, turn we to the Lord's Table, where He is ever ready to receive us. He offers this precious feast to us week by week, and unworthy though we are to gather up the crumbs under His table, He still invites us : and says—"Come, for all things on *My* part are ready ; and *your* time is always ready."

SERMON XVII.

UNSUSPECTED DANGER.

PROVERBS I. 17.

"Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird."

A PROVERB is perhaps the most ancient form of composition, being a short and pithy sentence, containing the experience of some one whose influence and example has been thought to be of value : and which, however simple, has continued to be current in the mouth of the people long after the first speaker of it has been forgotten. Thus, for instance, we find David, when He has refrained from using his power to harm his oppressor, Saul, citing (in 1 Sam. xxiv. 13) the simplest of all proverbs, "As saith the proverb of the ancients, Wickedness proceedeth from

the wicked : but mine hand shall not be upon thee." As though he would say, "You count me wicked, yet you see that no wickedness proceedeth from me :—therefore, if this proverb speak the truth, you must count me so no more."

But proverbs were not always quite so simple as this. They often took up a special event or circumstance, which was itself surprising,—and were quoted whenever any similar event called forth the same feeling of surprise. Thus, for instance, when Saul was an undistinguished youth, God gave him, it is said, another heart ; and so, when he met a company of Prophets (1 Sam. x. 12) he was compelled by the Spirit of God to prophesy with them. His neighbours, filled with amazement, cried, "Is Saul among the prophets?" The saying became proverbial in Israel, and was quoted, doubtless, on many occasions, when one man saw another in unusual company. But the time came, after the lapse of many years, when it was applied by the people to the very man in whose history it first originated. When Saul, now the King of Israel, had shown an unworthy jealousy of his faithful servant, David, he came to Ramah to demand him as a rebellious subject, at the hands of the Prophet Samuel. But such was the influence upon him of the scene, that was before him in the Prophet's School, that his mind was once more opened for the temporary reception of divine influence ; and he prophesied like those around him—and, as the historian says, what had now become a

proverb, was strikingly illustrated, "Is Saul also among the Prophets?" (1 Sam. xix. 24.)

Thus the application of a proverb depended upon the resemblance of the circumstances under which it was quoted, to those under which it was first spoken. Very often, however, the comparison suggested in a proverb is the resemblance between something in the life of the lower animals and something in the life of man. Such is evidently the case with the proverb that forms our text, the first real proverb in the Book of Solomon, in which it is found, "Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird." By its words is clearly implied the sagacious instinct of the brute creation, which keeps them out of any snares that may be openly laid for them. If a bird has seen and detected the fowler's trap, she is sure to keep herself out of it. He may lay his nets with the greatest adroitness, may dispose his bait in the most tempting form, may whistle his liveliest and most alluring tune—but in vain; if the bird has seen him stretching the net, she will be proof against all temptation. The natural comparison is then from the lower to the higher intelligence, to the man, who is, no doubt, far wiser than a bird;—surely against him, then, any open fraud must be tried in vain! If he is ever so much tempted, he will hardly be drawn away, when he knows the result of being entangled: if a bird once warned is safe, surely, then, much more a man!

There is, however, something ironical in the word,

"*surely*," as prefixed to the proverb. The wise Solomon has, in the words that precede our text, put men on their guard against the tempter, who would lead them into evil, and then introduces his proverb. Yet his experience tells him, that the very men whom he has forewarned will scarcely listen to the words of wisdom, but rather plunge into a course of folly, even though he, and a thousand proverbial philosophers like him, have held up before their eyes the fatal consequences of the course on which they are about to enter.

And is not Solomon right in this his quiet irony? Is it not even too true, as God said by the mouth of a prophet, many generations later, that animals, with their limited instinct, shew more wisdom sometimes than man? (Isaiah i. 1), "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider;" or (Jer. viii. 7), "Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the Lord." We know this, brethren, only too well, if not by our own sad experience, at least by what we have seen in the case of others, who have seemed not less secure than ourselves. We have seen them guarded apparently on every point against any temptation;—nay, perhaps we have even seen them stand safely where others have fallen. But a time has come at last when they are off their guard, and they give way when it could be least expected. The

net seems to have been spread before their very eyes ; yet they see it not, or at least act as if they did not see it ; and some disgraceful fault entails misery on the rest of their lives.

But a single appropriate example is always better than any number of abstract statements ; and no better example could be found than is presented by the history of him who collected the Book of Proverbs, which under his name has found a place in the Volume of Scripture.

The youth of Solomon was spent under the most favourable circumstances : the great sin of his father, David, and his mother, Bathsheba, must have led to a life-long repentance on their part, which could only have adequately displayed itself in their care of this their cherished son.

We have the short and simple record of his childhood, "that the Lord loved him : " (2 Sam. xii. 25) and we may be quite sure that his parents would not suffer him to become contaminated by the evil companionship of his brothers, Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah.

When placed on the throne, as he was at an early age, so early indeed that he described himself as a child (1 Kings iii. 7,) in experience, if not in years, he showed a rare wisdom and discretion, which amply justified his father's choice of him as his successor. The approval of the Almighty was then signified to him by a vision granted to him at Gibeon, whither he had repaired to offer sacrifice in the Tabernacle erected by Moses in the wilderness,

which he proposed soon to supersede by the erection of a glorious permanent Temple, in the city in which his father David had already found a home for the ark of God.

The vision is told at length in Kings iii. 1. The presence of Jehovah seemed to be vouchsafed to the king, when his bodily functions were suspended in a deep sleep : " Ask," said the glorious Being, " what I shall give thee." To some men the choice would have been embarrassing : but not so to the youthful monarch. He humbly stated before God the greatness of the duties he was called upon to discharge, and then prayed in these terms (1 Kings iii. 9) " Give thy servant an understanding heart to judge Thy people, that I may discern between good and bad : for who is able to judge this Thy so great a people?" His prayer was accepted : God approved his choice, and gave him what he sought : but gave him at the same time two other blessings which he asked not, either of which, if received alone, might have been dangerous, but which the other and greater gift could make subservient to the honour of God. " Behold, I have done according to thy words : lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart ; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches and honour : so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days. And if thou wilt walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days."

Such was the promise, and literally was it fulfilled. So great was Solomon's wisdom, that men came from all parts of the world to hear his words, and as the Eastern custom was, to prove him with hard questions. And none went away unsatisfied. One great Queen in particular, came from Sheba, a distant southern land (1 Kings x. 3-9) "and when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart. And Solomon told her all her questions : there was not any thing hid from the king, which he told her not. And when the Queen of Sheba had seen all Solomon's wisdom, and the House that he had built, she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it ; and, behold, the half was not told me ; thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard. Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom."

Much of this wisdom was no doubt conveyed in a proverbial form, and hence we have the Book of Proverbs, which contains a few only of the three thousand proverbs he is said to have uttered. Much took the form of poetry, though of all his ten thousand and five songs not one has been transmitted to us, in Holy Scripture. But the best proof of his practical wisdom is the manner in which he dealt with neighbouring sovereigns, so as to consolidate his kingdom without the necessity of foreign wars,

and to avail himself of the resources of other countries, in the way of trade and commerce. We have further proof of his wisdom in the promptitude with which he executed justice, and the care which he bestowed on the organization of his great kingdom, so as to supply the wants of his capital, and of his court, without pressing unequally on any part of the people.

But the highest and noblest display of his wisdom is found in the manner in which he made his great wealth subservient to the honour of God, whose servant he professed himself, in erecting the Temple, according to his father's plans, with a magnificence which has never been equalled or surpassed ; before he applied himself to the work of building his own palace.

In all this, we recognize in him the true Son of David, the Prince of Peace, as the name Solomon may be translated, the Favourite of God, as his other name, Jedidiah, signified. Could such a man, then, with this wisdom, so far so well applied, be likely to fall into the snare of the evil one? We should be disposed beforehand to say *no*. "Surely in vain," we should protest, in his own proverbial language, "would the net be spread in the sight of any bird"—in vain must the world, the flesh, and the devil, seek to ensnare one so fully armed at all points as the wise king of Israel ! But history, with its impartial record of sad facts, compels us to say that the sarcastic tone which we find in that proverb is fully justified by Solomon's own history.

The riches, the power, the magnificence, by which he was encompassed, seem to have gradually overclouded his wisdom. He, that knew the value of justice, and once practised it so well, became the oppressor of his subjects. He, that knew the value of commerce, as the means of strengthening his kingdom, and promoting the prosperity of his subjects, made his navy the means of importing not merely gold and ivory, but as the historian ironically says, "apes and peacocks." He, that knew the value of peace, and prospered by maintaining it, multiplied chariots and horses, which could only be useful in case of foreign war. He, that fully recognised the beauty of virtue, the value of married life, and the blessings of a well-ordered home, as he has shewn in so many proverbs, set the foulest example of sensuality that the world has ever seen. He, that knew the dignity of the priesthood, vested in the family of Aaron, took some steps towards the assumption of a royal Priesthood, such as that of Melchizedek of old, which was to be the prerogative of Christ alone. For at the dedication of the temple, it was he, and not Zadok, the High Priest, who offered the solemn prayer, who dedicated the temple, and who blessed the congregation.

Nor was this all:—when he had established his glorious temple, and taken care that the services performed in it should be exquisite in their taste, gorgeous in their splendour, uniting all the charms of music and of processional display, he seems to have contented himself with the outward beauty of such devotion, and to have

given it no place in his heart. For history tells us that he built temples, less grand perhaps in outward appearance, yet no doubt highly adorned, for the worship of the idol gods of those neighbouring lands, from which he had drawn together the women who shared the name of wife and the honour of queen with the daughter of Pharaoh, his earliest and best beloved wife, for whose marriage feast he is said to have composed the nuptial Hymn, which is now numbered as the 45th Psalm. She apparently was a true proselyte to the religion of Jehovah, as that Psalm implies. "Kings' daughters were among thy honourable women : upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir. Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear ; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house ; so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty : for he is thy Lord ; and worship thou him." And it is remarkable that among all the national idols for which Solomon erected temples, there is no mention of any of the false Gods of Egypt.

Such was the fall of Solomon ! Thus did the wisest of men suffer himself to be ensnared ! Thus with his eyes open, as we may say, did he throw himself into every net that was spread for him by those enemies, against which he, if any man, was forearmed, the world, the flesh, and the devil ! We have no definite record in Scripture of his repentance, but we hope from the tone of the book of Ecclesiastes, which was apparently written in his later days, that he returned to his allegiance to the Almighty.

We are told by Jewish legends that God's anger fell upon him, as upon Nebuchadnezzar in his pride, and that he was driven from his throne, and wandered as a beggar through the kingdom that once was his, until he had repented of the three definite offences against the law of God of which he had been guilty (Deut. xvii. 14-20) "When thou art come unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, and shalt possess it, and shalt dwell therein, and shalt say, I will set a king over me, like as all the nations that are about me ; thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the Lord thy God shall choose : one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee : thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother. But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses : forasmuch as the Lord hath said unto you, Ye shall henceforth return no more that way. Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away : neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold. And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites : and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life : that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them : that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the

right hand, or to the left : to the end that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel." But of this we know nothing, and must therefore be content to leave his judgment in the hands of God.

But to what purpose have we cited his example, except as a warning to ourselves? We have not indeed his great wisdom, we may, on the contrary, be conscious of grievous deficiency in that respect, and be disposed to say of ourselves that we are but little children as compared to him, even as he said of himself, in comparison of the wisdom of God. But what of that? The wisdom that we have is from the same source as his, and will be as efficacious for our preservation as his would have been for him, had he but acted consistently with it.

His wisdom was from above. God's holy Spirit enlightened him, and would have guided him safely along the road of life, even as he did at the outset of his career, had he not disabled himself by wilful sin from acting upon such heavenly suggestions. And even so, Christian friends, is that holy Spirit given to you, and to all children of God, to put into your hearts good desires, and to enable you to bring them to good effect. In vain therefore will the devil spread his nets before you, if you exert your spiritual eye-sight to detect and to avoid them.

Are you at the outset of life? You now perhaps abhor all that is evil, and fancy that nothing coarse or vicious can ever be a temptation to you. Beware however—the temptation, when it comes, will come in no revolting

form ; but you will first be tried by things indifferent, that may possibly lead to evil, and then gradually by evil itself ; and that evil may perhaps be so presented as to be unrecognised as evil, because it has lost its grossness.

Are you in middle life? You have passed safely through so many snares already, that you feel yourself secure, and begin to boast of your own sagacity rather than continue to acknowledge God's protection. Beware then : the feeling of security leads often to a fall. You may have been proof against the snare of sensuality, but the deceitfulness of riches may yet be your ruin. Are you declining into the vale of years? You may have served God well for many years, but your devotion may have been mechanical rather than lively, your religion may be like that of the Laodiceans, neither cold nor hot, and you may meet with a like rebuke to theirs. (Rev. iii. 15 and 16.) Beware, in every case, beware :—whether you be old or young, rich or poor, learned or ignorant, beware. Look out for snares and avoid them, as God has given you the power ; but at the same time entreat of Him that He will open your eyes to your danger, lest when you think you stand you be on the very point of falling !

And yet be not afraid. The Lord Jesus Christ is with you : He has trodden the same thorny paths that you have to tread, and has kept His own feet from the snares of the evil one, who met Him at every turn. And He is, as it were, treading over again the same dangerous road with each of you. He is in the midst of you here,

watching your devotion, and grieved if it be not real. He will be with you presently at His own Holy Table. He is with you in sickness and in health, in tribulation and in joy. If He be for you, who can prevail against you?

Let your prayer be that which the Psalmist offered in all humility, and certainly not in vain (Ps. xxxi. 5, 6). "Draw me out of the net, that they have laid privily for me: for Thou art my strength. Into Thy hands I commend my spirit: for Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, Thou God of truth."

SERMON XVIII.

THE ELEVENTH HOUR.

MATTHEW xx. 7.

"No man hath hired us."

THESE words, which occur in one of our Lord's most well known Parables, are evidently considered to be a sufficient answer to the question of the householder, "Why stand ye here all the day *idle*, or rather, as we might better render the word, *unemployed*?" It was customary for those who were willing to work, and yet had no fields of their own, on which they might employ themselves, to take their stand in the market-place of the city, or at the gate of the village, in which they dwelt, and there to wait for a call to labour. These men were evidently desirous of work, and were by no means captious as to

the remuneration they were to receive ; for without a moment's hesitation they went at once, in obedience to the call, " Go ye into the vineyard," and were quite satisfied with the very indefinite promise, " Whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive." Nor was their faith unrewarded ; for they received, for their small portion of a day's work, the very same payment as had been stipulated in behalf of those who were hired at the dawn of day.

To industrious men, such as they evidently were, we can well conceive that it must have been most irksome to have been so many hours unemployed : the call to work must have been a joyful sound to them, and the one hour during which they could labour before sunset, must have been the happiest portion of their day.

As this narrative was a parable, it no doubt had a special application, and was intended to read a lesson to those who heard it when our Lord spoke. And, first, it reproved the Pharisees and other men learned in the Jewish law, who had been called by circumstances to a knowledge of their duty, and, to a certain extent, had performed it, during great part of their lives. They were jealous of the admission of publicans and sinners to the Baptism of John, and afterwards to the congregation of Christ's disciples, on the same terms as any of themselves. They knew that they had led decent lives, and behaved in outward matters as servants of God for many years ; and they were vexed to see men, who had, in many cases, lived a life of extortion and excess, and women whose bad

character was notorious in their own neighbourhood, allowed to sit down at the table with One whom they could not deny to be a great moral Teacher, and even to touch His sacred Person. *They* would have said to such people, "Stand further off, for I am holier than thou." To such censorious men our Lord reads an important lesson, and describes exactly their feelings, by the words put into the mouth of the labourers sent early into the vineyard—"These have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal to us, who have borne the burden and heat of the day" (v. 12). It was very true that they had been longer in the vineyard than those of whom they spake: but was it the fault of the others that they had not been there also? The Parable gives the answer: they had not been hired, and, therefore, could not have been there. And so in like manner the publicans and harlots, who crowded round our Saviour, had hitherto enjoyed no such advantages as the Scribes and Pharisees had possessed. No man had apparently cared for their souls. They had belonged to that outer edge of the Jewish nation which had lived in practical heathenism, though really children of Abraham. "This people that knoweth not the law, said the Pharisees, are accursed:" (John vii. 49) forgetful of the fact that it was *their* fault that so many of their countrymen were in that condition, which they so scornfully described. When these despised persons heard such words as "If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink;" (John vii. 37) "Come unto Me, all that are weary

and heavy laden, and I will refresh you" (Matthew xi. 28) they learnt for the first time that they also had a place in the vineyard ; and He that had thus called them, suffered them not to go away unsatisfied or unrewarded. They rejoiced with trembling joy to be admitted to do even the meanest service for Him : they heard with self-application His words, and felt that He was indeed One who was come to seek and save the lost (Matthew xviii. 11).

A second warning our Lord's Parable must have read to His own Disciples, who had now so long followed Him that they seemed to claim Him exclusively for their own, and to fancy that their privileges were not to be shared with any others who were not of their company. Of their need of such an admonition we may judge from the manner in which they shortly after dealt with the case of one whom they found casting out devils, and yet not visibly attached to their little band. They forbid him to exercise a power which God had given just as evidently to him as to them, and thus brought upon themselves the rebuke—"Forbid him not." (Mark ix. 39.) And thus still later, when it pleased God to call into His fold the persecutor, Saul, and appoint him for a chosen vessel to do the same work and to enjoy the same privileges as the twelve, they were at first unwilling to believe that He was really a disciple : and it needed the strong representation of S. Barnabas to induce them to give him the right hand of fellowship. (Acts ix. 26, 27). He had indeed accepted our Lord's call only at the eleventh hour ; but that, not

because he had resisted previous calls, but because he had sinned ignorantly up to that time, and in unbelief." (1 Tim. i. 13). "No man, up to that time, had hired him;" to use the words of our text,—but when once he knew his calling, he went at once into the Lord's vineyard, and laboured more abundantly than all those who were already there.

The same parable conveyed also a rebuke to the whole Jewish Church of Christ : in fact to the whole Church as it existed previously to the Mission of S. Peter to the house of Cornelius. It was, indeed, till that period, composed entirely of the children of Abraham, and seemed to be rather, in the eyes of the world, a reformation of the Jews' religion than an extension of the blessings of covenant with God to the whole world. The existing Christians, as being Jews by birth, looked down upon all Gentiles as common and unclean. And S. Peter would, doubtless, but for the vision on the house-top, neither have entered the house of Cornelius, nor have admitted him to Christian Baptism, till he had first conformed to the Mosaic Law, and then through it had made his way to the blessings of the Christian Covenant. By the words spoken to him at Joppa, and by the visible descent of the Holy Spirit on the Gentile brotherhood at Cæsarea, S. Peter was led to cry, "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized?" (Acts. x. 28, 47.) He was compelled to admit that their absence hitherto from the vineyard was not from their unwillingness to

enter, but because "no man had hired them."

If then the Jewish teachers to whom our Lord spoke, His own apostles immediately afterwards, and His Church in general in its first and purest age, could learn a lesson from this parable, may it not teach us also something?

Many of us are perhaps disposed to look upon a large proportion of the population of this nominally Christian land as irreclaimably vicious, and to speak with loathing of their faults as reported in the public journals. I could not for a moment wish to palliate such offences against common morality: but I would wish to suggest to those who regard them thus, and who shrink from the perpetrators as from beings unworthy of the name of man, that such crimes, if committed by *them*, would be indeed without excuse, as being committed against light and knowledge. But the case of those who now commit them is very different. They have perhaps been born among wretches, in whose eyes a great crime is rather a distinction than a disgrace. They have been brought up in the grossest ignorance and barbarity. If they have ever heard the Name of God, it has been in some form of execration. They have been baptized, perhaps, but if so, it was in infancy, and they have never been taught the meaning of the Sacrament, which was thus profaned in its administration to them. They know that they must die, but they have been told but little of a life beyond the grave in either happiness or misery.

Should it happen, as in God's merciful providence it

sometimes does, that such persons as I have described are made aware of their sinful condition, and brought to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, and so become, even late in life, humble and faithful worshippers, the Pharisees of our day look upon them with scorn, and scarcely deign to believe that the same heaven is open to them as to men and women who have been well brought up, and have led for many years a Christian life. "These," say they, "have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us!" And why not? we indignantly reply. Surely in behalf of these, if of any men, may be urged the plea—"No man hath hired us." They were indeed pledged to be Christ's servants, but they knew it not. They had a conscience, but it was uninformed. When once, however, their responsibilities were brought home to them, they acknowledged them;—when once their conscience was informed, they obeyed it; and thus they were accepted, however late, as labourers in the vineyard, whose work, however short, was not despised, and shall not be unrewarded.

Still more is this the case with regard to the Mahometan and heathen world. People are amazed at the atrocities of which Turks and infidels are occasionally guilty, and seem to think that no words can be too strong to characterize them. But while blaming the crimes, they also unfairly condemn the criminals; forgetting the errors in which they have been brought up; the systems, which have put evil for good, and good for evil; the passions,

which they have never been taught to control.

When, therefore, the success of missionary exertion is reported, as happily in these days it often is, there are men found who speak with disparagement of the newly-baptized Christians, and express doubts of their earnestness. What? is it their fault that they have, as it were, well-nigh spent their day in idleness? May it not be urged in their behalf, "that no man hath hired them?"

If these considerations then be true, what practical duty do they lay upon us all? Not merely the avoiding of unfair censure, but also the active attempt to diminish the number of those who, from circumstances, are called but late to enter the vineyard. An ignorant and, consequently, criminal population is around us in this great metropolis, which contains as many practical heathens as do some awowedly heathen lands. Can we not then do something for them? We can indeed, and many of us are trying to do so. The Christian Schools which are now being extended like a net-work over the land, are doing excellent work in this direction. The missions, the reformatories, the refuges are taking part in it;—and many of you, I doubt not, are, by your contributions and prayers, if not by your personal exertions, contributing to the result which we hope may one day be brought about, that no one in this Christian land should be obliged to say, "No man hath hired us."

And so also beyond the seas, in our colonies and other possessions, is there not a mission work to do, in regard

to the heathen, of whom it is asserted, that nearly half the heathen population of the world are subjects of the British Crown? I care not to examine this statement, and support or refute it by figures : it is notoriously true that our Indian Empire contains one hundred millions of heathens : and ought we not to do for them much more than we have yet done ? Men wonder at the little success of Missions to heathens : but have they a right to wonder when they see how slackly they are undertaken ? We are beginning the work late, but not, we hope, too late to achieve something. And it will be a shame indeed to us, as a Christian nation, if our heathen fellow-subjects continue in ignorance of what we believe to be God's offer of "peace on earth and good-will to men." Many who are our fellow-subjects, who might have been, but are not, our fellow-Christians, would be only too well-entitled, in excuse for ignorance and neglect of duty, to plead, "No man hath hired us."

But I must not quit the subject of this parable, without adverting to the guilt and danger of those who cannot plead the excuse that no man hath hired them, and yet pass their entire day without working in the Lord's vineyard. There are people, only too many, who fully acknowledge the certainty of a future life, and hope at length to lay claim to its rewards, and to escape its punishments, by a repentance and a turning to God at the end of a careless and sinful life. They surely know not what repentance is, who venture thus presumptuously to look

forward. God has all their life long been urging them to repentance, yet in vain. They have been constantly putting off the day, and reckoning that it will be easy at the last to turn to Him and be accepted. They comfort themselves by the expression "the eleventh hour," and seem to fancy that this may mean even the twelfth :—that when the hour of the cessation of labour is about to strike, a number of workmen who have refused to come in earlier, may rush into the vineyard and claim their wages and the feast, though they have not done a stroke of work.

Men see at once, in human matters, the folly of such a claim : yet they act as if they meant to urge it for themselves. If any of you have cherished so fatal a notion, indulge it no more. Whatever hour may have struck in your career, obey the call to labour, without waiting for another invitation ; for you cannot say, "no man hath hired us." You have owned yourselves Christ's soldiers and servants long ago,—but you have deferred to begin His work ; defer no longer, lest the door of the vineyard be shut, and there be no place for you ; lest your heart be so hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, that you cannot turn and repent, to the saving of your souls.

SERMON XIX.

A DOOR OPENED.

2 COR. II. 12, 13.

“When I came to Troas to preach Christ’s Gospel, and a door was opened to me of the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus, my brother : but taking leave of them, I went into Macedonia.”

ST. PAUL, in this Epistle, writes in all the fulness of his heart to the Corinthians, to whom he has but lately addressed a letter of reproof in regard to certain faults of doctrine and of practice. Delighted with the promptitude which they have shewn in acting upon his admonition, he is now chiefly anxious that the offenders, who have been rebuked by Church authority, should not be overpowered with the sorrow, which he wished them indeed to feel, but in which he would not leave them comfortless.

Having expressed his mind on this subject, in the early part of this chapter, he now proceeds to speak of what immediately concerns himself. And you will observe that he describes himself, not *personally*, as Paul the tent-maker, or Paul the native of Tarsus, or Paul the citizen of Rome ; or as Saul the Benjamite, and Hebrew of the purest descent, or Saul the Pupil of the learned Rabbi, Gamaliel, or Saul the trusted messenger of the Jewish Senate : but rather as "*the Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ.*" In that character they had known and received him, when he first preached the Gospel in their city, and when he addressed to them his former letter ;—and in that character he feels that they will be interested in hearing from him now.

They must have learned from Titus, who had been the bearer of his first Epistle, that he had been persecuted at Ephesus, and compelled by his friends to leave that city, rather than to endanger his life needlessly by exposing himself to an excited multitude in the Theatre. He now tells them that he has continued his Evangelistic labours in various other cities till he has reached Troas, the place from which he had originally set sail for Europe. In this city he has found much work ready for his hand. To use his own expression, "A door has been opened unto him of the Lord." Fain would he have staid there, to preach Christ's Gospel, but his mind was too anxious for him to devote himself to this work at the moment, as he found not Titus, whom he appears to have appointed to meet

him there. He therefore, as on his former visit, has passed on at once by sea to Macedonia, and staid not till he has reached Philippi, where he has now met with Titus, and heard from him the manner in which the Corinthians have received and acted upon his first letter. Overjoyed at the tidings, he is full of thankfulness to God, who has given him the victory over the spirit of licentiousness which had begun to develop itself in the Corinthian Church, and has sent from Philippi, by the same faithful messenger, this second Epistle from which our text is taken.

In connection with that text, let us endeavour (i) to trace in its words that the great object of S. Paul, as of every faithful Christian minister now, was to preach the Gospel of Christ.

(ii.) That God opened to him various opportunities of discharging this great duty.

(iii.) That he had the power, in most cases, of selecting that particular work, among many, which appeared to him the most pressing.

(iv.) And that whatever success he obtained was due to God's blessing on his work.

1. First, then, what do we understand by preaching Christ's Gospel, which is the Apostle's own expression? It is no mere reiteration of certain phrases, as some appear to think, no simple call upon man to believe certain things concerning the great work of Christ for

mankind in general, and for those in particular, whom Christ's minister is addressing ; but a work infinitely varied according to the circumstances of those among whom he finds himself. The heathen and the Jew were not to be addressed in the same way—the groundwork must be laid in each case according to the knowledge that each possesses : and then the great facts must be pressed home upon the conscience of both alike, that God hates all sin : that all men are sinners : that no man can make an atonement for his own soul ; and then, but not till then, must the glad tidings be made known, that Jesus Christ has made an atonement for all sin. If we examine the preaching of the Apostles recorded in their Acts, we shall find that they proceeded thus : that on this foundation they based the necessity of the two Sacraments for uniting the soul to Christ, and keeping it in union with Him : and then demanded of each believer obedience to the Holy Spirit's guidance, in order to serve God the Father in a pure and holy life. Our attentive study of S. Paul's Epistles will show that this was the course pursued by that Apostle ; and will convince us that nothing would have been more abhorrent from his spirit than to announce certain party shibboleths or watchwords, and to consider them the essentials of the Gospel. His method was infinitely varied, in endeavouring to reach the conscience of each. To the Jews he spoke as a Jew : to the Gentiles from the ground of Gentile knowledge : to those under the Law as to men who needed emancipation from its burden : to

those without law, as to men who had a law written in their hearts, and who needed a divine sanction for its dictates. To use his own often misused expression, he was made "all things to all men," that he might by all means save, or bring into the kingdom of grace, some of the thousands whom he addressed at various times and places. (1 Cor. ix. 22.)

And such as was S. Paul's work in the old time, must be the work now of those who speak, in heathen or Mahometan countries, to men who have not yet been taught to know Christ as a Saviour. We, in this country, are not in that sad position. We have all, from our infancy, known Him in that capacity, and, I trust, have owned Him in our hearts. But we also need to have our "pure minds stirred up by way of remembrance." (2 Peter iii. 1) and therefore the same topics are brought before us from time to time, though not necessarily in the same order, and with the same completeness, as if we were hearing them for the first time. And by whom is this done? The Acts and Epistles will show us that the Apostles ordained elders or ministers in every place where they preached, in order to secure the transmission of their teaching, and the due administration of the Sacraments. In each case, when they departed, they commended those, whom they had thus called to the ministry, to God: and when they were able, communicated with them afterwards by letter or by personal visitation, to encourage them in their work, and, when necessary, even

to advise and to correct them, as we find S. John doing, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in regard to seven churches of Asia. (Rev. ii. iii.)

And this institution still happily subsists among ourselves. We, as dwellers in a Christian land, have the blessing of churches in the midst of our towns and villages, and ministers appointed, as of old, to preach the Gospel to us :—to keep alive among the well-instructed the memory of those truths long since imparted, which form the joy of their heart : to instruct the ignorant in those things that they should have known, but unhappily know not ; to admonish the disorderly, to comfort the desponding, to rejoice with them that rejoice, and to weep with them that weep ; in fact, to lead on the portions of Christ's flock committed to their charge, until they be all united hereafter before the throne of God, among the multitude of those that are saved.

If then the evangelist or missionary could not be expected to present the topics of his preaching in any uniform order : still less can a parochial minister do so. He must give his instruction according as he thinks it needed : line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little. Sometimes he must dwell upon the great doctrine of the mysterious Trinity : sometimes upon the equally mysterious Incarnation of the Lord Jesus ; sometimes upon the inspiration and sufficiency of Holy Scripture ; sometimes upon the use of Christian Creeds ; sometimes upon the value of Baptism as the foundation

of Church fellowship ; sometimes upon the Lord's Supper as the means of union with the Saviour ; sometimes he must hold up the terrors of God's wrath ; sometimes he must display the attractions of Christian love ; sometimes he must describe the happiness of the Saints in light ; sometimes he must dwell with sorrow on the condition of those thrust into outer darkness, who have refused the love of Christ, and are, therefore, for ever excluded from His love.

11. And this brings us naturally to our second subject of consideration, that God gives his servants various opportunities of preaching Christ's Gospel. This is implied by what the Apostle says of a *door being opened to him* by the Lord at Troas. The same expression had been used by him, long ago, in his report at Antioch of his first success among the Gentiles (Acts xiv. 27) ; when he and Barnabas rehearsed " All that God had done with them, and how He had *opened the door* of faith unto the Gentiles." And even thus he had lately spoken in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, (xvi. 9) " A *great door* and effectual is opened unto me, and yet there are many adversaries." Thus also at a later day he begged the Colossians (iv. 3.) to pray for him, " that God would *open unto him a door of utterance*, to speak the mystery of Christ." And thus also the Holy Spirit, speaking by S. John in the Book of Revelation (iii. 8), to the angel or minister of the Church of Sardis, says, " Thus saith He that is Holy, He that hath the key of David ; He that

openeth and no man shutteth : Behold I have set before thee *an open door*, and no man can shut it."

By this frequently used expression we understand that God himself guides His ministers to opportunities of usefulness : that on many occasions, when it would seem to them that they can do literally nothing in His cause, He suddenly opens, as it were, a door before them, in the midst of what had seemed an impenetrable barrier, and expects them to go forward and do His work. Thus, for instance, He finds a time and place at which truth may be spoken with advantage : He softens men's hearts, that they may be ready to receive what at another time they would probably have derided : or He even enables the representative of Christ unconsciously to select the best arguments or the best methods of enforcing them upon his hearers.

All this has sometimes been done in a miraculous manner, as when the Holy Spirit sent S. Philip into the wilderness to address the Ethiopian (Acts viii. 26), and S. Peter to the house of the Gentile Centurion at Cæsarea (Acts x. 20), and in each case prepared a willing heart to accept the preaching of the word : or yet more marvelously, when He prohibited S. Paul from preaching in Proconsular Asia or turning aside into Bithynia for the same purpose ; but led him down almost by force to Troas, and thence warned him by a vision to cross the sea to Macedonia, and preach for the first time in Europe (Acts xvi. 6-10).

Such manifest and direct guidance the minister of Christ expects not now, but the Holy Spirit's direction is not the less real ; and the experience of every Christian, who seeks to extend his Master's Kingdom, will furnish him with abundant instances of such *doors* being opened, and of the success that has followed on embracing the opportunities that God has given.

III. But here follows our third point, that on most occasions God leaves His servants to choose, when more opportunities than one are presented, which should be taken first, as being the more pressing, or the more likely to advance the cause of God and His Church. We have seen, in the history of the Apostles, instances in which it would have been impious to refuse the leading of God, as in the case of S. Philip, S. Peter, and S. Paul. But how many other occasions may there have been, in the life of the same saintly men, when they had to use their own judgment, as to the right way to turn, the right door into which it was their duty to enter. Such was evidently the case with S. Paul at Troas. A door was opened before him by the Lord for preaching the gospel there, in a place which he had visited before, but hastily. Many persons there hoped to hear from his lips the Gospel, of which they had received hitherto but a faint and uncertain sound. But he had another duty before him, and that was to learn from Titus the result of his first letter to the Corinthians ; whether that Church had submitted to his decision, or had proudly scorned his apostolic authority.

So much depended upon this, that he was led to count it a greater duty to pursue his journey till he met Titus, than to linger still at Troas, even though there was work for him there to do for God. The people of Troas may very likely have blamed him, or have thought him unkind in deserting them. But he used his best judgment, and we have no reason to think that in so doing he was negligent of a real duty. There were two courses that might be adopted, and he believed himself to be selecting that on which he ought to enter. And as it was with the Apostles and other servants of Christ, still more must it be the case with a minister of the Church in the present day. Within the limits of his parochial charge he must have many calls of duty of which others know nothing; he can but select first what appears to him the most pressing, and then proceed to others. It is not for those without to blame him for his selection, and to think that he had better have looked in another direction first. To his own Master he must stand or fall, taking only care that he is convinced in his own mind, before he accepts one duty in preference to another.

iv. But here we are led naturally to our fourth and last point, that as it is God who opens the door of usefulness, so it is God also who gives success to the efforts made. When God had led S. Paul to Philippi, He opened the heart of Lydia to accept the words of his first preaching there. When He had suffered him to be thrown into prison there by his persecutor, He terrified the jailor by

a miracle, and thus prepared him to ask the question, "What shall I do to be saved?" It is thus we understand the words of our text of God's opening a door. It is He that makes the preparation both in the teacher and the taught, and well it is for each of them, if they be careful to avail themselves of their reciprocal advantages.

But so entirely does our Lord and Saviour identify Himself with the opportunities of grace that He opens before us, that He on one occasion carries the comparison which occurs in our text to a yet further extent, saying, (John x. 9) "I am the Door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved." He is not, therefore, merely personally interested in our salvation, but is personally labouring for it. And shall we, whether teachers or taught, venture to disappoint and grieve Him? We can if we will: He has left our will free, and compels us not to be saved, whether we will or no. Among His twelve Apostles there was a Judas; He compelled him not to repent and be saved; but He strove with him, as it were, (Matt. xxvi. 23-25) and opened repeatedly to him the door by which he might return, and by his repentance obtain re-admission to His love. Yet that man persevered in refusing to enter in at the open door, and was lost. S. Peter was in outward appearance well nigh as culpable; but He saw in the look of Christ a door open to repentance, and went out and wept bitterly. Against him, therefore, the door was not closed, but he heard in due time the words, "Lovest thou Me? then feed My lambs,

and follow thou Me." (Matt. xxvi. 75. John xxi. 15-17.)

Let the one of these be our warning, the other our encouragement ; and whatever position we occupy in the flock of Christ, whether learned or unlearned, rich or poor, teachers or taught, let us pray that we may have a right judgment in all things, by the aid of God's blessed Spirit ; that we may discern the path of duty, wherever it may conduct us, and pass resolutely through the Door that leads to it ; knowing that Christ is Himself that Door, and that if we reject Him, we are rejecting our own mercy.

Great is the loss of a congregation, when the minister prays not personally for the people among whom he labours, or when the people pray not for their minister. Each needs the prayer of the other ; they are mutually dependent, and Christ is interested for each. He will not neglect such faithful prayer, when it is offered to Him, but will rain down showers of blessing upon those who thus make it evident that they put their trust in Him.

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